



M^R DE BEAUMARCHAIS.

Beaumarchais

AN ADVENTURER IN A CENTURY OF WOMEN

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

	PAGE
IN THE SHADOW OF THE <i>ROI-SOLEIL</i>	vii

PART I

WHAT IS HONOUR WITHOUT MONEY ?	I
--	---

PART II

THE ARISTOCRAT AS A BOURGEOIS	65
---	----

PART III

A FORTUNE-HUNTER IN MISFORTUNE	131
--	-----

PART IV

THE MARRIAGE WITH THE PEOPLE	205
--	-----

PART V

THE GREAT FEAR	287
--------------------------	-----

EPILOGUE	308
--------------------	-----

INDEX	311
-----------------	-----

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

		<i>Frontispiece</i>
BEAUMARCAIS	.	.
		FACING PAGE
LOUIS XV	.	32
PRINCESS ADELAIDE	.	60
THE MARCHIONESS OF POMPADOUR	.	92
THE COUNTESS DUBARRY	.	166
MARIA THERESA	.	186
LOUIS XVI	.	212
MARIE ANTOINETTE	.	264

INTRODUCTION IN THE SHADOW OF THE *ROI-SOLEIL*

IN 1685 Louis XIV had rescinded the Edict of Nantes, and any confession of Calvinism was punishable by law. Exactly ten years later a young man and a young woman left a small town north-east of Paris to be secretly married by a wandering Huguenot pastor. Inaccessible hiding-places in forests and mountain gorges were poor substitutes for the churches which had been destroyed. Daniel Caron, a watchmaker, and Marie Fortain, his bride, were married in one of these "churches of the desert." At their wedding they were given no encouragement; on the contrary, the pastor reminded them of the harsh destiny before them because of their Faith. The existing laws made it difficult for Huguenots to carry on any trade or profession. The pastor urged them to give up all ambition and not to hope that their life would be even tolerable. Despite these warnings the young couple were in an exalted mood when they awkwardly wrote "1695" on the parchment as the date of their marriage, and when they added the words: "God, the Creator of all, shall be our beginning and our refuge."

Nor did the watchmaker Caron and his wife despair later when the King tried to break the heretics' stubbornness by force. "It is His Majesty's wish that the remaining heretics who are stubbornly resisting him, shall be dealt with severely." Dragoons were installed in the homes of refractory Huguenots, in the expectation that the threatening presence of these soldiers and the expense of lodging them would force these mad Calvinists to see reason. Catholics avoided the watchmaker's shop which Caron owned in his native town, Lizy-sur-Ourcq. The shop was raided by soldiers, and when Caron's son, André-Charles, was a mere lad, he was ordered to put on the dragoon uniform worn by the men who were tormenting his family. Caron and his wife were extremely

poor, but they considered themselves martyrs for their convictions. And they died, exhausted, one soon after the other, convinced that together they had resisted the superior force of a temporal authority, and that in death they would find an eternal refuge.

If their grandson, Pierre Augustin Caron, had not become famous as Monsieur de Beaumarchais, this heroic couple would have been forgotten. Shortly after their death, the ladies and gentlemen at the Court of Versailles noticed that Louis XIV retired to his study more and more often. The King was writing. Was he changing his will? Well-informed courtiers denied this suggestion: the King's last wishes had been unalterably recorded. So he was not changing his will? And the Duc de Maine, who left the Royal study with a carefully sealed document, could only say that he had been instructed to hand over this document to the Dauphin when he came of age. What the document contained remained a secret among kings.

When Louis XV was finally given this document, he was of age, but not mature enough to understand the belated wisdom of his predecessor. The pleasure-loving heir was bored with this voluminous document. He read it and put it aside—without deriving any benefit from it. Instructions for a king of France? His vanity revolted against such an idea. He did not realise that as an old man his predecessor had become introspective, contemplating himself and his own actions. Louis XV did not understand the tragedy of this dying man, who, in his imagination, had talked with him, a child then still in his cradle, but whom the old man already visualised as the future king, as his own image, as the continuation of his own will. “Turn your gaze on France and not on foreign countries.” Did this advice to his successor imply a criticism of himself? Louis XIV's imagination had always dwelt on the world outside his own country. Did he want his successor to concentrate on France?

Louis XIV advised his successor against a policy of tolerance towards the Huguenots. The *Roi-soleil* opposed heterodox views; any opinion which differed from that held by the people as a whole was an active doubt of his Royal infallibility. Despite this attitude, however, he was quite aware of the Huguenots' resistance. He identified himself with his people, and his feeling of solidarity with them was grandiose and grotesque at the same time. When he thought of the Huguenots, however, he was like a healthy man who is suddenly afraid that an infected finger may destroy his whole body. The armed rebellion, the Huguenots' Chamissard Revolt, which he suppressed by force, had not worried him. He was troubled instead by the intangible spirit which caused men to reject the religion which he himself followed on earth, and which would have allowed them to share the same heaven with him after death.

Was his power decreasing? Louis XIV could not hide from himself that his will no longer determined the European balance of power. His country was in debt—unfortunate wars had cast a shadow on the triumphs of his youth. Had he himself been wrong when he devoted more attention to foreign affairs than to his own country? He had dedicated his life to glory rather than to the welfare and happiness of the French people. He was an experienced statesman, and he foresaw that his successor would be faced with greater dangers from within than from foreign enemies. How and through whom? Would these dangers be caused by religious struggles between the Jansenites and the Jesuits? Or by the reformists, who wanted to reorganise the financial administration? Louis XIV could not answer these troubling questions. He realised only that by suppressing the Huguenots he had failed to exterminate the spirit of resistance in his country. Nevertheless, he had confidence in the power of the material and spiritual heritage which he left his successor. True, he forgot that the power of the oppressed is far more persistent than the power of the oppressors—often this power skips one generation.

PART I

WHAT IS HONOUR WITHOUT MONEY?

CHAPTER I

THE life of André-Charles Caron, Beaumarchais' father, was typical of the destiny of thousands of Huguenots. Without the moral support of his parents' living example, he was not strong enough to cling to the forbidden Faith. He renounced his religion —partly because he could not bear a soldier's existence any longer—and left the regiment which he had been forced to join. He wanted to live as other men lived, and not be condemned to permanent unemployment and hunger. The pressure exerted by the Catholic world in which he lived had broken down his resistance.

André-Charles, who was then twenty-three, had been trained as a watchmaker by his father before he was forced to become a soldier. He wanted to be a watchmaker. If he was not strong enough to carry on the religious traditions of his family, he could at least continue in the trade of his forefathers.

On the seventh of March, 1721, the Cardinal of Noailles confirmed the fact that André-Charles Caron had renounced Calvin's false religion in the church of the "new Catholics."

From that time onwards the inhabitants of the old quarter round St. Denis noticed that a man, whose bearing even in civilian clothes betrayed the old soldier, went regularly to church. As he wanted to express his faith in God, he carried out the duties of his new religion with puritanical steadfastness. The authorities had not enquired into his personal convictions. They were satisfied that this son of a Protestant watchmaker had accepted the "true Faith," and when he sent a respectful petition to the State Council asking for permission to follow his trade, his request was granted.

André-Charles Caron was married less than a year after his Catholic baptism. He established himself as a watchmaker. A quiet, middle-class life lay before him. To the end of his days he would have made and repaired clocks and watches—unconscious

of the fact that each turn of the hands was strengthening the French people's spirit of resistance—if his son, whom he brought up according to his parents' puritanical ideas, had not emancipated himself and developed in the opposite direction.

André-Charles's efforts to make of Pierre Augustin a believer concerned only with the welfare of his soul were a failure. The boy was temperamentally unsuited for this training; besides, the times were against it. "He was particularly strong, and he preferred to clench his hands into fists rather than to fold them in prayer. His blue eyes were too vivacious; it was impossible for them to gaze only at the heavens." He was pleased with his own handsome appearance. He was the only boy among five sisters. The older ones encouraged his vanity; the younger ones, who admired him, made him vainer still. His mother was delighted when he showed an early appreciation of music. She was a Parisian, and she was happy, when the family returned from church on a Sunday, to notice that Pierre Augustin remembered, not only the organ melodies, but the popular songs he had heard in the streets on his way home as well. Like all servants who like to play with the children of the house, Margot, the maid, encouraged the boy's exuberant spirits. In Paris the nervous gaiety of the Regency, the reaction after the death of Louis XIV, still persisted. Pierre Augustin was exposed to so many violently contradictory influences that he was forced to make a decision. He was unable to control his temperament, which Voltaire later called "irrepressible," and become the pious man the watchmaker Caron wanted him to be. The period in which he lived, however, was the most important factor turning him from the religious attitude which his father tried to impose upon him, often by force, and which the boy met by hypocrisy.

The Guild regulations of the eighteenth century provided that the sides of watchmakers' shops facing the road were to be of glass, so that the inspector of the Guild of Jewellers and Goldsmiths could

ascertain in passing that the watchmakers were using the gold and silver, needed in their craft, only for clocks and watches and for the ornaments, which were indispensable in their trade.

Pierre Augustin spent his childhood behind one of these glass walls. He did not choose the workshop as his favourite playground, as his father thought, because he had an hereditary interest in the watchmaker's bench. His urge to ingratiate himself with people had awakened early. He was praised when he came into the workshop; and undisturbed he could follow his childlike inclination and look out into the street. For him the workshop was a watch-tower. While his father and the apprentices examined the mechanism of the wheelwork, listening to the movement of the clocks, ticking in many keys, which they were testing, he watched the street.

Protected behind the smooth transparent surface of the glass, the boy's chief characteristic soon developed: his reckless desire to know every phase of life. This impulse, which was more than curiosity, and yet not a thirst for knowledge, for he was too un-systematic for that, would move him on the spur of the moment as a situation arose. After every difficulty, every failure, this impulse revived him, and it determined the destiny of the future Monsieur de Beaumarchais. He was never startled when his life suddenly changed. Each turn of affairs presented a fresh view. He discarded the past and was always able to begin life anew. When necessary, he became the exact opposite of what he had happened to be before. From a courtier he changed into a revolutionary, from the accused into a judge. He was often forced to change his attitude towards the world about him, but the apparent spontaneity with which he devoted himself to each new profession, each new activity, each fresh point of view was intense, and it seemed impossible that the day before, or a year or a decade before, he had defended the opposite position, that he had then had another profession, that his activities had been completely

different. He hated the heavy weights which habit would have imposed upon him. In his imagination the scene changed with great rapidity. A new stage? A new costume? The newness and the change were the essential factor as far as he was concerned and it was also important for him to play a big part in the new scene, for "mediocrity would poison his life."

Pierre Augustin's childlike imagination was stimulated by the view of the road. The obvious comparisons, which it could not avoid as he studied the street before him, directed his fantasies into channels which were later decisive when he chose a career. Middle-class men and women, citizens of Paris, dressed simply like his own father and mother, were not an unusual sight. The lad, apparently gazing absently into space, was actually waiting in excitement for a nobleman with a huge wig to pass, his hat under his arm, his sword at his side. This costume forced these proud aristocrats to carry themselves unnaturally upright. Aristocratic ladies, who drove past in their carriages, presented a still more imposing picture. But young Pierre Augustin was not intimidated by the haughty and severe expression of their faces, which seemed curiously small under the enormously high structure of their hair, nor by the proud demeanour of the men. The glass wall protected him. The boy was not exposed to any danger as, his eyes fixed on them, he watched these passers-by, and the objects of his interest were unaware that he was wondering how their clothing and their bearing differed from those of the other men and women in the street. Who were these aristocrats? Where had they come from? Where were they going? He suppressed the questions which puzzled him, for he was afraid that his father might guess the real reason for his passionate attachment to the workshop and rob him of the happiness he felt as he stood in front of the glass wall.

The watchmaker's youth had made him taciturn. He talked only when someone mentioned his parents' fate. Then the spell of his silence was broken. He described their poverty and their

heroism so graphically that their terrible suffering rose before Pierre Augustin like a concrete reality, which frightened him and kept him aloof from his father. The impression left on his young mind by this sad story confirmed the boy's feeling that his father, who was always serious, hated gaiety of any sort; in fact, he was afraid that he would be punished if he, too, did not seem serious whenever his father could see him. To avoid unpleasantness the lad assumed this mask. Outwardly he adjusted himself to his father, but this only strengthened his inner resistance towards everything connected with him.

Pierre Augustin, in common with most children, was shy about his secret fantasies, and he never dared ask his mother or his sisters about the splendid passers-by. He was dependent upon himself, and instinctively, therefore, he applied the method of comparison, the inflexible logic of facts: the gorgeously clothed men and women were not like the watchmaker. Their faces were smooth and untroubled by terrible memories; the ornaments they wore showed that they must be wealthy. Pierre Augustin was attracted by them. In his imagination he had identified himself with them to such an extent that at first, when he was told about the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy, he did not understand. No one could become an aristocrat; a man simply was a nobleman: Later he thought this over: What made a man an aristocrat? He was beside himself when he heard that one could be an aristocrat only by birth. As he was not an aristocrat, he had been born wrong, he had come into the world in the wrong surroundings. He was so distressed by the thought of the irrevocable, unalterable station in life imposed on a man by his birth, that he did not go to the workshop. By staying away he was not only protesting against his father's middle-class trade. In his childlike defiance he did not want to see human beings who had been born into another class; he refused to be reminded by their presence that he himself was separated from them by more than a glass wall.

His decision to give up his watch-tower was weaker than his imagination. He felt slighted, but his curiosity tormented him. Beyond the world in which he lived there was another world. Where was this world, and what was it like?

When this problem began to haunt him, his interest centred on every new customer who came to his father's shop. They were men who lived outside the glass cage. He could observe them closely and listen to them. Most of his father's customers were footmen, wearing the bright liveries of the great families whom they served, who brought large or small clocks to be repaired. These servants, who assumed the haughty manner of their employers, brought more than broken clocks into the shop. For they were living newspapers; they repeated anecdotes and rumours, and Pierre Augustin learned details about the world which fascinated him. What he heard confirmed his own conclusions: he had been right. He realised that the facts he heard outdid his own fantasies, and he did not try to curb his imagination.

Soon the footmen's talk no longer satisfied Pierre Augustin. Occasionally the servant of a parliamentary councillor came to the shop, because his master needed his watch to time every case in Court. The footman therefore wanted the watch at once so that he could take it to the *Palais de Justice*. Then, as soon as his father had left the workshop on some errand, the boy would hurry to the *Palais*. It was not far to the *Palais de Justice*. He crossed the bridge over the narrow arm of the Seine, to the Île de St. Louis, and already he stood before the magnificent gate, decorated with golden arrow-points and the fleur-de-lis of the Kings of France. He stared at the entrance; he saw the huge carriages drive between the broad gates; he watched the magistrates in their black robes and their white wavy wigs leaving their carriages; he saw the accused walking nervously and shyly through the portals.

The *Palais de Justice* presented a more lively scene than did the homes of the aristocrats, above whose doors, hewn in stone, the

boy noticed the same coats of arms which were embroidered on the footmen's liveries. A carriage rarely drove in or out of these *hôtels* of the aristocracy, which seemed dead and deserted. Only the side entrances were full of life; here the goods were delivered which the tailors, the dressmakers, the wig-makers, the jewellers, the manufacturers of gold braid and gold lace, the shoemakers, and the silk and lace shops had sent, so that the Dukes and Marquises, the Countesses and Baronesses, whose names Pierre Augustin memorised more carefully than he did the names of the saints, could appear before their masters in Versailles properly clad. The great ladies and gentlemen came rarely to Paris. They preferred their haunts of pleasure. Paris was the city of work, in whose narrow streets the splendour was manufactured which they produced in a brilliant setting in honour of their king in Versailles.

In Pierre Augustin's imagination the King was an unapproachable and powerful presence. He united everything that was splendid in his person. He was the supreme judge, the most noble aristocrat. Was he the personification of omnipotence on earth? The childlike extravagance of his thoughts was confirmed; for not only the footmen, who had accepted the cult of their employers, meant what they said when they told the boy that "only people living in the immediate surroundings of the King can say that he is actually alive."

Since Louis XIV had created the stage setting for the kingdom, everyone who wanted to have any influence in France was obliged to live in Versailles near the King, whether he liked it or not. "Sire, when one is separated from you," a courtier had once confessed to the *Roi-soleil*, "one is not only unhappy but ridiculous as well." Louis XIV lacked his great grandfather's heroic bearing and he was not really devoted to his subjects. This state of affairs was often expressed in other words: "Unless one lives at Court one is not given a post nor can one earn any money." That was why the King's every gesture, whether he had slept well, whom he had

honoured with a word, what he did, was far more important to all Frenchmen than were political events of far-reaching consequences. When he was a child, Beaumarchais belonged to that huge audience, which fifty years later, and not without his influence, destroyed the royal stage.

From the time when he was fourteen years old Pierre Augustin no longer sat behind the glass wall because he wanted to be there; now he was forced to join together the numerous small wheels and springs, the tiny mechanical objects which make up a single clock. The more difficult task of filing these tiny objects, of forging and of shaping them, had not yet been assigned to him. For the present he was an apprentice; his father wanted him to learn how to make a clock out of the many parts. He was to be initiated into the mysterious art of the watchmaker who, in accordance with nature and the revolutions of the earth, divides time into the smaller units of hours, minutes, and seconds.

Father Caron's preoccupation with clocks, his constant awareness of time, had imbued him with a philosophical patience and humility; his son, on the contrary, was possessed by a desire to hurry when he saw the seconds passing. Should he wait until he had learned this trade, until perhaps he might invent something which would make him famous (if he ever did invent anything) ? Should he wait until he became the watchmaker to the King or the head of the Guild ? Were these hopes not limiting his ambitions, would they not determine his whole life in advance ?

Despite his father's stubborn industry, despite his economy, he could not compete with firms of watchmakers who had been established in Paris for generations. And yet he loved his trade. Why should he, Caron-Fils, who disliked the trade, be more successful than his father ? He tried to make the ageing man see his point of view. In vain. - As a result of his protests his free time was shortened, and he had to pay a fine when he was late for church. He dared not rebel. His father's objection that he was obviously

not attracted by any profession was really correct. He had learned reading, writing, and arithmetic. That was all. What could he do with this knowledge? As an ordinary middle-class citizen he had no chances, that he knew. His lively imagination, however, placed him outside the rigid surroundings into which he had been born. Why should he remain an ordinary bourgeois?

His sisters were apprenticed in millinery shops, and they brought back to their parents' humble home tales of the brilliant life at Court. They discussed not only laces and ruffles, frills and braids. They preferred talking about the great ladies who sent their maids to the shop to order frocks or arrange for fittings; often gentlemen belonging to these ladies' households came to deliver a message. The number of aristocratic names important in Pierre Augustin's imagination increased. He was with his sisters constantly. He loved their feminine, aimless conversations, the fragrance of their empty talk, their careless gossip. He learned from them, for instance, that Madame de Boufflers needed a new robe of State, that Madame de Matignon spent twenty-four thousand livres a year in order to have a new head-dress every day. This gossip was like the chatter he had heard from the footmen—and it left the same impression on him. He was not frightened by the high sums his sisters mentioned, sums which showed that the aristocracy was also separated from the bourgeoisie by material values. He absorbed the facts he learned about the Court and the courtiers; he contemplated these facts as though they had been an exact science. The world into which he wanted to penetrate became clearer, more real.

Letters and short improvised poems show how Pierre Augustin made his sisters hope that he would raise them from a dull mediocre existence into the brilliant sphere of a better life. His powers of persuasion infected them. Everything was against him, but his sisters believed in his future career. Why not? For as a boy of thirteen or fourteen he wrote verses; music was in his blood, and

he was able to play any instrument he found. The rapid unexpected career of some financiers encouraged their hopes. But his sisters were experienced and worldly enough to warn him that to get on he would need a patron at Court. He must not forget that every position of State was dependent on the King's favour.

These obstacles made Pierre Augustin thoughtful. He proved to his sisters that he would easily find a patron at Court, for when he fantasied others could not resist him. He himself, however, remained a realist, weighing his chances. From every point of view they were disappointing. The positions which led to wealth, from the posts of large and small leaseholders, down to those of tax collectors, were all held by royal officials. Anyone not belonging to the privileged class had to be satisfied with learning a trade or with becoming a servant like the footmen, and even physicians and apothecaries were included in this servant class. There was one other possibility, and that was a business career: he might try his luck as an independent merchant or a wholesale purveyor to the State. But he would need money for such an undertaking—and he could not earn money without the King's licence. The circle closed again and again, and Pierre Augustin found himself outside it.

Caron the watchmaker knew no one who might have become a patron at Court. The quiet retiring man had no friends, and he had never made useful connections. Pierre Augustin realised that his family had no influence whatsoever when his sister Marie married Guilbert, a master mason, who needed useful connections to get orders. Father Caron had nothing to give his daughter as a dowry but a few outstanding debts in Madrid, for, like everyone else, the Spaniards ordered their luxury articles from Paris. The watchmaker advised the young couple to move to Spain. He urged Guilbert to look for work in Madrid, while Marie and her sister Lisette opened a millinery establishment.

Monsieur and Madame Guilbert did not believe that they would

have a future in Paris, so they accepted this advice and took Lisette with them. When the two sisters parted from their little brother, he told them with unwavering optimism that when they met again he would be a fine gentleman.

In his first letter to his beloved sisters, whose encouragement he greatly missed, he was no longer able to act his part, for he was too unhappy. "I wanted to commit suicide," he wrote, ". . . because of an unhappy love affair . . ." he added lightly when, as a grown man, he found this letter among his sister's papers after her death. "I had lived with a woman, who had ridiculed my youth and who had married someone else." But that was not the only unhappiness which tormented him. He was not troubled merely by the *Weltschmerz* of a thirteen- or fourteen-year-old boy who succumbs to his depression. He did not feel that the girl alone despised him. When he was free, and strolling about in his shabby suit, he saw aristocratic boys of his own age driving past him in their carriages. Their clothing only differed in size from that of grown-up noblemen. Their wigs were powdered white, a miniature sword hung at their sides, their coats were decorated with gold braid. Dancing masters and professors of good behaviour had taught them the noble bearing, which they maintained until the moment when the guillotine cut short their lives.

The boy standing at the side of the street gazed after them. He knew that these other lads of thirteen or fourteen were already in command of regiments, that because of their birth they would be raised step by step, while his own station in life kept him tied to the depths. This comparison hurt him. The sight of these other boys humiliated him. He was outraged by the "accident of birth." The fact that he had been "born wrong" made him feel that he was living in a prison. Was there no way out? He would have despaired, for apparently there was no hope for his future, if an untoward event had not been associated in his vivid adolescent imagination with his own future career.

CHAPTER II

ON a dark afternoon in the winter of 1745 the Chamberlain on duty in the apartments of the King of France came out into the Gallery of Mirrors in the Versailles Palace and announced to the assembled courtiers that it was morning.

This statement was contradicted by the clock, but the gentlemen in Court dress trimmed with gold braid took no notice of clocks. This was quite natural as, at Court, time was not measured by the dial of the clock or by the calendar. The new day began when His Majesty graciously opened his eyes and called for his levée.

That "morning," when the gentlemen entered the royal bed-chamber one after the other according to their rank, curiosity quickened their solemn pace. Louis XV had not returned from Paris until nine o'clock. Each of the courtiers hoped to be the first to learn what had happened during the night. They knew: until three o'clock the King had attended a ball in the City Hall. Where had he been from three until nine o'clock in the morning?

The Duc d'Ayen was the only member of his immediate following who had been with him on this mysterious expedition, but this malicious man was silent. His face, carefully made up under the mighty wig of State, did not betray a sleepless night or that anything unusual had occurred. Even when Louis XV glanced at him knowingly several times, the Duke's face did not reflect the fact that he was the King's confidant.

True, another Duke wrote that evening in his diary that the King had spent the night with a bourgeois.

This assiduous recorder of Court gossip was unaware that his note implied a turning-point in the history of the world. That the King, the outstanding public figure in the eyes of the people, had honoured a new woman with his favour, would have been sufficiently important to be remembered. But the news that the partner

of the royal pleasure was a *bourgeoise* ? A contemporary declared later that this night was the beginning of the French Revolution.

A middle-class woman the King's mistress ? *Maitresse en titre*, she had acquired a position which the most distinguished men desired for their virginal daughters, for their sisters, for their wives ? Had the Kingdom sunk so low—had the middle classes risen to such heights ? The ladies and gentlemen of the aristocracy were panicky ; it was as though they dimly foresaw that the new ruler of Versailles, born as simple Jeanne Poisson and recently married to Lenormant—soon she was raised to the rank of the Marquise de Pompadour—was the vanguard of the two thousand market-women who captured Versailles forty-five years later.

The event was discussed as violently, men and women were as moved by it as they were by reports of the army at the front. All France gazed at Versailles ; the curiosity and the interest of all Frenchmen were centred on this woman. How would the contest between this *bourgeoise*, who had risen in the world, and the aristocratic courtiers end ? In careless exaggeration the new mistress's struggle was compared with Maria Theresa's resistance, for at the same time, for her husband and herself, she was fighting for her Austrian inheritance and the Imperial Crown of Germany. The entire French Court was opposing Madame de Pompadour, just as all of Europe was antagonistic towards "the Queen of Hungary." France, too, had sent her armies against Maria Theresa, but this did not prevent the Parisians from saying : "A good rooster can manage seven hens, and the Queen of Hungary is showing seven men her teeth." The war was not popular : the heroic age of the *Roi-soleil* had passed. People were more deeply concerned with "the King's affairs with women than they were with his warlike affair with one woman."

Paris, which was fond of women, had been worried about Louis XV when, in his early youth, he had suffered from depressions, and his tutors had been obliged to remove the pages, whom he found too attractive, from his immediate surroundings. The

fact that he married and had children did not quite dispel the anxiety felt by the pleasure-loving subjects of this most Christian King. They were not relieved until they heard that he had not only a wife but a mistress as well. "This preoccupation with women and pleasure will make him less depressed, and it will develop his mind and his temperament more normally," Barbier, the lawyer, wrote. And after the death of the Duchesse de Châteauroux (who was not the King's first mistress), he wrote: "It would be a good thing if the King found a new mistress to-morrow."

Louis XV did not wait long, but the "new" woman was an unexpected sensation, not only for the aristocracy, most intimately concerned, but for the larger audience of the people as well.

The Court was easy-going. The alarm of those who had been personally disappointed was short-lived. As the King had chosen Madame de Pompadour despite her lowly origin, they were forced to ignore this embarrassing fact. And the Court ladies whom the King had slighted had to admit that "this woman" was as well bred as they were themselves, and that in her bearing and her manners she was their equal. The courtiers began to imitate Louis XV. They now found the women of the bourgeoisie very charming. The Duc de Richelieu, one of the most popular cavaliers of the period, outdid his King: not one, but two bourgeois women became his mistresses, and both lived in the same house.

The gentlemen at Court were fully occupied with their pleasures, and after their first surprise that love had overcome class differences, they had no time for sociological considerations. None of these aristocrats noticed that the simple citizens of Paris were carrying their heads higher now that one of them had been deceived by his wife. Unobtrusively the unsurmountable barriers which had separated the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy began to crumble. Madame Poisson's example incited other mothers to bring up their

daughters as clever Madame Poisson had brought up hers. Every girl in Paris thought that she might one day be at least an uncrowned queen—obviously their ambition was curbed only by the limits of these girls' own imagination.

"At that time women ruled," Vigée Lebrun, the famous painter, wrote some years later. "Their influence was indirect, but it was actually universal. Sixty years later, every simple French soldier believed that he was carrying a marshal's staff in his knapsack, while at this time every citizen who had a beautiful daughter, an attractive sister, or a charming wife was convinced that he would rise in the world as Madame de Pompadour's father and brother had risen. These citizens did not forget that Monsieur Lenormant, Madame de Pompadour's husband, had been compensated for her loss by the very remunerative post of a *farmer-general*."

This attitude was certainly immoral, but the feverish atmosphere it created was so violent and so general that only a few individuals were strong enough to resist it. Pierre Augustin Caron was not among those who showed character. Besides, few men in his generation were as easily influenced by the atmosphere of his age as he was.

The lad of fourteen or fifteen no longer depended for news on the footmen who came to his father's shop. He spent his days under the discipline imposed upon him by his father, but in the evenings he wanted more amusing surroundings. He was no longer content with the companionship of his sisters, who had remained in Paris, and their friends. He roamed about the city in his free time, he began to know Paris from the street-urchin's point of view, he imbibed the feelings of the people, whose rebellious frame of mind was still humorous. The boy often stood among the stands in the market, and he learned from the market-women's

remarks that his upright bearing, his impertinent eyes, his fine build were pleasing to them.

He joined in their talk, in the disapproval of current events which they expressed in crude jests. These market-women, pointing to their fish baskets, prophesied that Mademoiselle Poisson would soon be floundering about without water. They asked each other whether the Pompadour planned to include a drawing of the gallows in her new coat of arms. Her father, a financial clerk, had escaped the gallows only by his flight after his frauds had been discovered. As a reward, the doors of the great houses in Versailles were now open to him. He was on excellent terms with the aristocracy. The market-women jestingly said that married couples in the aristocracy met only when it was necessary to legitimise the lady's condition by the presence of a husband. "Who is the father?" the women would ask, mentioning the name of some aristocratic lady. The boy learned from these women that an aristocrat who loved his wife was looked on with contempt. A lady who had no lover was considered unworthy; a man who had no mistress was obviously not gifted by nature to love. The women praised Madame de Pompadour's beauty, but they complained that the new Marquise was even more luxury-loving than the King. While the armies were collapsing at the front, the Pompadour was finding employment for the large army of actors, sculptors, and painters, arranging for her own amusement, who were commanded by her deserted husband's uncle and by her mother's lover.

Father Caron was a puritan, his respect for authority prevented him from expressing any criticism, but Pierre Augustin made up for this silence in his own home by the malicious observations he made to himself after listening to the market-women. If the Court, he asked himself, was so immoral, if the more dissipated a courtier was the greater was his prestige, why should he, Pierre Augustin, not be able to penetrate into this world and get on?

His reasoning went farther: why should the daughter of a watchmaker not be as successful as the daughter of a financial clerk, who, apart from everything else, was being prosecuted for fraud? He studied his sisters with the eyes of an expert. Fanchon was hearty, Tonton lazy, and Julie vivacious. Which of the three might be eligible? He tried to find out what they thought of his plans. Only Julie, the youngest, would listen to him. But she was not pretty enough to assure his future. He soon realised that none of his sisters was strong or weak enough to make a career for herself. He was disappointed. When he talked to Julie, a fresh possibility, the antithesis of his original idea, occurred to this half-grown lad. He thought very clearly: why should a male creature not overcome class prejudices as successfully as a woman had done? If a middle-class girl had attained the highest position by becoming the King's mistress, why should the son of a simple watchmaker not become the lover of a princess, thus gaining access to the highest positions of State?

A much-talked-of incident tended to undermine his respect for the Court ladies even more. At the same time this gossip encouraged his fantastic plan. Madame de France, the fourteen-year-old Princess Adelaide, had been given *Le Portier des Chartreux* by her governess. The Princess was so impressed by this novel that she recommended it to the Dauphin. Her older brother could hardly believe his eyes. The engravings in the book left little to the imagination. If the text corresponded to these illustrations—? After all, the Princess was still a child. The Dauphin took the novel and asked for an audience with his father.

Louis XV had an antipathy towards "philosophers and writers." His indolent foresight often prompted him to make a statement, but rarely compelled him to take definite measures, and he declared that writers of books were the Huguenots' successors, that they

would become more troublesome than their predecessors. Louis XV did not enjoy reading, but if etiquette had not prevented, he would have appointed the Princess's frivolous governess to the post of his librarian. He was very much amused, and he regretted the fact that he had to put a bad face on a good game. He banished the lady from Versailles, but he told everyone, whether people wanted to listen to him or not, that his fourteen-year-old daughter Adelaide had read a pornographic book. "Soon the entire Court and all of Europe knew about this incident," the Chronicler continues, but he forgot to add: all of France.

Pierre Augustin's fantasies were not stimulated only by this episode. Contemporary history continuously reported some new event—some actual fact—which moved him more profoundly than did the approach of his fantasies to reality. In the war against Maria Theresa the French were obliged to call upon a foreign general, Moritz of Saxony, and when he was discussed in Versailles, the Prince de Conti remarked that France would not produce great men as long as "our women are attracted by footmen."

Pierre Augustin's cynicism was strengthened by such remarks. He compared himself to the footmen whom he knew, and he ascertained with satisfaction that this comparison was favourable to himself. He needed only an opportunity to prove his superiority, and it should be said that he was determined not to be satisfied with uncertain pleasures or doubtful honours.

Nevertheless, the Prince's contemptuous remark had offended against his class consciousness. The Prince, who was later one of Pierre Augustin's friends, had declared that France and the aristocracy were one. The Prince and his compeers agreed that only a Marquis or a Duke, a member of the aristocracy, could become a great man. The fine gentlemen believed that only they were capable of being great. Pierre Augustin did not appreciate until much later that this was his first revolutionary thought; he was not conscious of this fact until he had been Monsieur de Beaumarchais

for a long time, and could judge by his own career that the rise of every man of the people is a revolution on a small scale. For "the other members of a family rise with the successful individual; their ambition is fed by his example. The rise of the one leads to the rise of many, who see through the life led by the upper ten thousand and destroy it, if they are not accepted as equals."

At this time young Caron had not the slightest intention of destroying the life of the upper ten thousand. He longed only to participate in the magnificent ceremony of Court life. He wanted first to be a fine gentleman, then it would not be difficult to become a great man.

He did not weigh the difference between good and humble society. He hoped to establish some contact with the higher stratum of society, and society in general attracted him so much that, in the evening, he escaped from his parents' humdrum home into public-houses frequented by at least one gentleman of the governing classes. He was proud when a man, with a sword at his side, allowed him to sit at his table. Convinced that he, too, would soon be wearing a sword, he tried to win this gentleman's approval. The humble craftsman's son disappeared instantly. He played the piano, he sang, he was so witty and gay that the bored aristocrats, longing for amusement, asked him to join them.

Even in his gayest moods the ambitious youth never forgot his intentions. Everything he did was merely a means to an end. As he had no connections with the Court, he believed that a lucky chance would help him to find a protector. Each aristocrat he met might be the friend for whom he was searching. He made a systematic effort to please. To acquire sufficient insight into human nature, Pierre Augustin worked hard; he disciplined himself and studied the types of human beings whom he met. Each acquaintance had to be approached differently. He suppressed his own innate self-assurance, the feeling of his own superiority, which was increased by his observations.

As the companion of an aristocratic man of the world, Pierre Augustin was admitted to the theatre booths in the market-place. This was his first natural pleasure. As he watched the crude harlequins on the makeshift stage, his painfully acquired self-control vanished, and he felt an impulse to jump over the footlights and to join the actors in their improvised jokes and comic turns. After the performance the aristocrat took him to the dressing-rooms. "A new world, more attractive than the Court, received him with open arms." The young actresses preferred his companionship to that of the aristocrat, who was paying for the evening's entertainment.

Now, in his own mind, Pierre Augustin began to lead a double life. In his imagination he was an actor as well as a spectator. He was a man in the stalls, wearing a sword and a wig, and gazing condescendingly on that other creature, across the footlights, whose gestures, humour, and voice were set in motion to please him. Both rôles attracted him equally.

The first time he made up his face he did so to amuse the girls and the visitors in the dressing-rooms. But his face took the make-up so well, his bearing adjusted itself so spontaneously to the rôle he was acting, that he became passionately interested in the theatre.

His was a flaming passion. His need to adjust himself to every situation, every person, to impersonate others, to assume their facial expressions, was satisfied during the rehearsals. But when he had appeared on the stage, the first outburst of applause drove him behind the scenes. He was afraid that he would be recognised, that he would be unmasked in the literal sense of the word. To overcome the accident of his birth, to become an aristocrat, he had sought the society of aristocrats. What had been the result? He had lost caste; he was no longer an honest craftsman. When he wore a stage costume he was not the son of Caron, the watchmaker. Could a profession which was despised be a worthy aim; was an actor not considered to be beneath a footman?

Despite this self-criticism the sixteen- or seventeen-year-old youth was unable to sacrifice his passion for the stage to his ambition. He continued to act. But secretly. He had not yet chosen between one position in life and the other: to be an actor or a well-bred spectator. He let matters slide. He had become accustomed to leading a double life. But he had to be careful, lest his two worlds, so widely apart, might impinge upon each other.

On the primitive stages of the market-place, no one would have suspected this actor to be the honest watchmaker's son, who performed his duties in the workshop by day, and who, after the excitement of acting, dreamed of becoming an aristocrat.

CHAPTER III

WHENEVER Monsieur de Beaumarchais, the famous writer, the successful speculator and politician, was asked about his youth, he said: "I was gay and happy." He had very carefully thought out this answer, which was consistent with his entire scheme of life. He wanted always to seem pleased, to be cheerful even about his past. It provoked his adversaries when he paraded his gaiety. But it won for him more friends than enemies. A man who is gay, who sings, and who never inflicts unhappy moods on his surroundings, is generally popular. No one tries to avoid him; on the contrary he is sought after, especially if, despite his own gaiety, he listens to the troubles of others. But the youth of Pierre Augustin Caron, the simple craftsman's son, was not as carefree as it appeared at a distance of years to the ageing *grand seigneur* Beaumarchais. The lad was consumed by ambition. He suffered, because he was not an aristocrat but a human being of secondary importance. He was without money to satisfy the extravagant tastes awakened in him by his association with the theatrical world, and comparisons—always the whip of his life—caused these unsatisfied desires to assume tremendous proportions. He never got on well with his father, who despised the boy's tastes, and who watched over him like a warder in a prison.

The watchmaker's seriousness had not yet capitulated before his growing children, who brought popular songs into his house, and who would have stayed at home only if he had been gay with them. Instead of mellowing, his principles seemed to stand the test of his children's frivolity. He believed that only a moral, orderly life made human beings honourable. He was more convinced of this than ever when he discovered that some clocks had disappeared from the workshop. Had his son advanced himself

money on his future inheritance : Caron turned him abruptly out of the house.

The youth, thus suddenly deprived of his home, does not tell us what he did while he was alone. He did not contradict when his enemies claimed that he had spent his unscrupulous youth living on women's earnings, as a street musician, or a vagabond like Villon. He did not reply to these accusations with devastating *mémoires*, he did not publish pamphlets against this "obvious slander," as he always did when he had proofs and could do so. He was cautious. Perhaps someone could prove that these accusations were true. He disliked being reminded by others of how he had earned a living, and he did not want to remember this himself. Did he earn his living as an actor ? Or as a comedian at the annual market fairs ? Or did he write poetry for special occasions ? At any rate, he experienced a hard struggle, or he would not have accepted his father's harsh conditions: that he would forgive him if he subjected himself entirely to the old man's will. His resistance was never strong enough for him to sacrifice a decent living. As he had lost his foothold, he wanted to secure his immediate future. Submissive and happy to be allowed to return, he accepted the refuge in the warm nest of his family.

He submitted to his father, because he appreciated that he must submit if he wanted to satisfy his ambition. His decision was deliberate. If he remained with the vagabonds, the human beings without roots, if he followed his inclinations and became an actor or a musician, his chances, uncertain as they were, of having a career as a courtier would be definitely over. He realised that everyone who wants to succeed must ascend a ladder, and that a successful man must skip several rungs on it. Perhaps honesty, even honesty which was only assumed, would pay better in the end.

As usual he was following the stream of thought dominating

the period. Dissipated men about town were no longer the fashion. He noticed that the aristocrats, to whom he listened, were talking in a different vein. New problems arose in their conversations, and often he could not follow them. Intuitively he understood the impetus behind these new ideas.

Under Madame de Pompadour's sceptre—"the rule of Cotillon II," Frederick the Great's irony towards Louis XV prompted him to call the "reign of the Mistress"—a new fashion arose in the *salons*: people were educating their minds. This began when the Marquise, who had known the poet Voltaire when she was Madame Lenormant, continued to befriend him after her entry into Versailles. She was an informal creature, and she loved the King not only because she wanted to exploit him ; she really loved him, which offended the Court. And she was grateful. Together Voltaire and the future Cardinal de Bernis, then a humble abbé, had censored the verses and letters which she had sent to the King—she repaid this kindness by fulfilling the dream of Voltaire's youth. He, too, was allowed to go to Versailles. Unlike Molière, Voltaire did not go to Court to see the characters in his comedies at close range, to study the courtiers whom he wanted to ridicule. On the contrary, Voltaire himself was ambitious; he wanted to become a great gentleman. As literary historians point out, this ambition prevented him from contributing "comedies to French literature, which despite his ambition Beaumarchais was able to write."

Young Caron had not read Voltaire, he had not the faintest presentiment of his own literary career, nor did he have any intention of competing with the man who suddenly became known as "the uncrowned king of the Nation." His keen scent for the developments of his age had led the actor-watchmaker to the trail of learning. It was the fashion to discuss philosophical questions, to know something about history and literature. Men whose names were not included in the red-book of the nobility were

mentioned and quoted by the great world. Diderot and d'Alembert were at work on a huge book of learning: the *Encyclopédia*—"The building is going up and Europe admires it." It was a vast lexicon of ideas, which was to make it possible for everyone to penetrate into "the treasures of human knowledge and of the sciences." "Upright and learned men of all classes of society are contributing to this important work."

Pierre Augustin did not want to lag behind. But in his first attempt to capture the sciences by storm, his powers, which had heretofore enabled him to conquer every new field of endeavour, were not sufficient. He soon realised that it was not enough to have read a few pages in learned tomes, or to learn them by heart. A long and arduous period of study was required if a man wanted to shine as a philosopher. As a philosopher or as an artist? He thought this over. Perhaps it would be more in harmony with the spirit of the age to make a special contribution in a new field of learning? A new field? Young Caron veered round by one hundred and eighty degrees, and surprised not only his family and his friends, the small intimate circle, before whom he had appeared as an almost professional winner of hearts. No, this time he astonished and impressed a larger public.

A new field of endeavour? Of course, it was really an old one. The watchmaker's trade was accepted as an art, the *art physicien*—from the point of view of social distinctions this art was considered entirely middle class, because middle-class men were the craftsmen, but, intellectually, it was the equal of any other art.

Pierre Augustin decided to remain a watchmaker, for a time at least. He left the ambiguous world in which he had been living as an occasional actor. His father's conditions were hard, and it was trying for him to remain eight or sometimes ten hours—"until the darkness of night began"—at the watchmaker's bench. Nevertheless, he was attracted by the art of combining the various parts of the clocks' mechanism. The technical possibilities of his trade

intrigued him. He began by putting the parts together in an unusual manner. At first this was like a game. He built huge pendulums and he wanted to make tiny watches from the smallest parts. With a tenacity which differentiates genius from even the most talented amateur, he tried to discover faults in the clock-works. He made drawings and models of clocks, and he soon remained in the workshop after his regular hours of work, for his father forbade his childish games. Nor did he give up his experiments when he learned that the most gifted watchmakers in France had hoped in vain to solve the problem which absorbed him, a youth of twenty. For to achieve something extraordinary was, after all, his main object.

In his spare time he played or sang ; he wrote satirical verses and set them to music. His material for these satires was supplied by the *chronique scandaleuse*, which he never neglected for an instant.

A sudden fancy led to a change in his life : a cousin of his father was a watchmaker in London. It was said in the family that this Huguenot, who had emigrated from France, had attained wealth and position. Pierre Augustin wanted to exchange ideas about his trade with his cousin. The man living on the other side of the Channel enjoyed this correspondence with the ambitious youth, and suddenly young Caron owned a specially designed magnifying glass.

It has never been known whether, simultaneously with this glass, he constructed his "escapement" which regulates the movement of a clock.

When, which happened rarely, members of a guild had serious disagreements, the Minister of the Royal Household, the Comte de St. Florentin, acted as the judge. Le Paute, an established old watchmaker, purveyor to the King and to the aristocracy, was prosecuted

by the twenty-year-old son of a watchmaker. The young man signed his petition, "Caron-Fils." The controversy concerned the priority of an invention. The aristocratic gentleman, who was interested only in the King's favour, and in women, was to decide which of the two watchmakers had originally discovered the "escapement" which assured a regular and reliable movement of clocks.

If the exchange of ideas about scientific subjects had not been superficial at this time, if such an exchange had already been well developed, the Count would have found it easy to pronounce a judgment as wise as Solomon's. He would simply have said: "Neither you, Monsieur Le Paute, nor you, Monsieur Caron, have discovered the 'escapement': a Mr. Graham in London was the original inventor, and English watchmakers have been using this invention for more than thirty years."

The Comte de St. Florentin would have dismissed the two ambitious men. But he was a courtier and nothing else, and he therefore preferred young Caron, whose manners were perfect, and who, after glancing at the Judge's bored face, agreed with everything he said to Le Paute, who bowed with the respect to which the Count was accustomed. The Count decided to ask the Academy of Sciences for an expert decision.

Pierre Augustin left the Minister's reception room in an elated mood. He had not been dismissed in an off-hand manner, his personality had attracted the attention of one of the highest dignitaries of the State, and this showed him that he knew how to deal with people of this kind. He had been right: three years of work, hard work, had been more successful than his previous attempts to come at least within sight of the world into which he was determined to penetrate.

If the Count had not been gracious to him, Pierre Augustin would have been dissatisfied with himself. He had made one mistake in connection with his invention. He had consulted other

Paris watchmakers to make sure that the "escapement" was not already in use in France. He could not avoid explaining the reason for his visit to his colleagues. Monsieur Le Paute asked to see the new mechanism, and before the impecunious youth could apply it practically, the established and respected watchmaker published an account of the invention as his own in the *Mercure de France*. He hoped, in a modest manner, to attract His Majesty's attention to the fact that he had succeeded in contributing an "epoch-making achievement." He laid his invention at the feet of the King.

Le Paute had exploited young Caron's inventive talent, but he had not counted on his talent for dealing with life. Le Paute was startled when he was summoned before the Minister of the Royal Household, and his astonishment grew when he bought the next number of the *Mercure de France* from the newsvendors on the banks of the Seine.

It was as though the future master of the pamphlet had predicted his own future, as though, realising in advance the line of his future success, he knew where he would be strongest: he wrote. He had been taken in once; he had become cautious. He enquired about the *Mercure de France*. He studied each column of the paper, which differed from those with which he was later associated, for politics were not discussed in the *Mercure de France*. True, articles on cultural subjects and travel letters occasionally contained subtle allusions to politics, but these criticisms of current events were obvious only to the initiate. Pierre Augustin became an initiate at once—he at once grasped the meaning and the force of these allusions. A biting, unrestrained attack on Le Paute would have been a mistake. The dignity of his contribution to the paper must reflect the fact that his character, which Le Paute had discredited, was unimpeachable. The circumspect editor of the *Mercure de France* welcomed controversies which would make the paper more interesting, and an excellent letter by Caron-Fils appeared, in which

with great decorum he stated that he was the inventor of the “escapement.”

Not only Le Paute, but young Caron himself was utterly surprised when he read his own letter. For the first time his name was before the public, for the first time he had done something ; he was no longer confined to the obscure world of chance, he was no longer dependent on occasional applause. Instead, he had been officially recognised as a member of an honourable guild.

He told everyone about his quarrel and his provisional success. He enlarged upon his controversy with Le Paute. He intimated that his invention reflected genius ; he told his friends and acquaintances, whether they wanted to listen to him or not, that it was only the first step, that he would make more inventions. He was so full of ideas, he would say, that his inventions would not be confined to the watchmaker’s trade. He himself did not really know whether he was serious or whether he was acting the rôle of an inventor to impress people, just as he had played other parts with equal enthusiasm.

Actually he did succeed in improving a musical instrument : he corrected the pedal of a harp, which had not obeyed him. He demonstrated this new mechanism, and if anyone had doubted his ability, these doubts might have been shortlived, for his vivacious nature, now fully awakened, might actually have enabled him to make a really important invention in order to convince those who had not believed in him. Success inspired him. He had needed recognition from at least a small audience. A demon, a tremendous vitality, drove him on. He wanted to go on and on ; this was only the first step.

While his controversy with Le Paute remained undecided, Caron-Fils was making a tiny watch to present to Louis XV after he had been victorious in his quarrel. He knew that this plan was audacious. He had not yet been admitted to the Watchmakers’ Guild, but he was already contemplating the highest honour for

which a watchmaker was eligible. Not only was he making a watch for the King; more than that, he hoped to present it to Louis himself.

He realised that his hopes would be shattered if the Academy decided against him. He would be flung back into complete obscurity, and Le Paute, who was wealthy and had a large clientele, would do what he could to make him appear ridiculous. His future was at stake.

He therefore did what he did throughout his life in a crisis: he applied logic to his situation. He reconstructed the process of his invention; he took out his first awkward models, the drawings he had laboriously made. He supplemented some of these early efforts, until each phase of his invention was clear in his mind. He would be able to explain each step which had led him, after years of labour, to his final invention, while Le Paute would know only the ultimate result.

Young Caron carried out this logical plan when he presented his case to the gentlemen of the Academy. He persuaded them that he was indeed the inventor, and they decided in his favour. Pierre Augustin was pleased with himself. He had proven himself to be a good logician, though his ability as a watchmaker may not have been as great.

In the vast apartments, lined with mirrors, the ante-rooms to the King's bedchamber, more than a hundred courtiers were awaiting the moment when the chamberlain-on-duty would admit the favoured gentlemen who were permitted to attend His Majesty's *levée*. Chance, or the King's mood, then determined whether they would enter the royal bedchamber early enough to see the ruler of France leaving his bed and stretching out his hands to have them sprinkled with scented water. Sometimes the aristocratic courtiers were not summoned until His Majesty was already seated, half



LOUIS XV

Engraving by Vispré after a painting by Liotard

dressed, before his toilet table, submitting willingly to the ministrations of his valets. While they were busy preparing the King for the day, he talked to the gentlemen-in-waiting, asking them the news; he honoured a courtier merely by speaking to him.

An enormous bed stood in the background of the bedchamber. The King did not sleep in this bed, but etiquette demanded that he awake in it. The bed was the stage-setting of this vast apartment, busy with the elegant activities of the chamberlains and the royal dressers, and filled with the nonchalance of the clerical dignitaries and of the great gentlemen, who watched the ceremony with aristocratic restraint.

The brilliant costumes and uniforms impressed everyone who saw this magnificent scene for the first time. The famous names of France, associated at the same time with two-thirds of the landed property in the country, were represented daily at the King's levée. These gentlemen attentively observed the proceedings of the bedchamber. As soon as the wide ribbon of the Order of the Holy Ghost had been placed round the King's neck, the gentlemen-in-waiting handed him a list of persons to whom he had granted an audience. When the King did not know them he was told who they were and why he was going to receive them. These men, not knowing that the King had been informed about them in advance, were surprised when the ruler of France knew their names and their professions, and they were impressed when he addressed them with a pleasant familiarity, as though he remembered them.

In his bourgeois suit, though wearing his best clothes for this great occasion, Caron-Fils looked shabby next to the courtiers whose gold-braided coats and scented jabots surrounded him. He was not embarrassed. He had enquired about the royal levée, and he knew that in due course he would be received in audience by the King without pressing forward. Only for a moment, as he entered the apartment, did he feel shy. The King of France's subjects were intimidated by the Divine Right

which gave him unlimited power. What expression would he assume, Pierre Augustin wondered, when the King finally spoke to him ? Then Pierre Augustin saw a kind, somewhat bored, handsome, and insignificant face, and the eyes in it were as brilliant as Bengal lights.

A shrewd judge of human nature knew at once that the man wearing the ermine cloak was insignificance personified, and that the pale scented hand would rather have held a hollowed sceptre than a heavy one of solid gold. One had to be close to the King to see all this distinctly. Louis XV had imposed severe rules of etiquette upon himself in order to keep his subjects at the proper distance, and this meant that it had become a strain to be a king. This weak man must have been exhausted when every awakening meant confronting a hundred faces which had to be recognised, when he was forced to remember from the first moment of the day that his rôle as an actor had begun once more, that he, a human being, must play the part of a king. Etiquette prescribed the routine of each hour of the day, from early in the morning until late at night, and before he went to sleep he was forced to endure the same ceremony which awaited him again in the morning.

How can a human being develop when he knows in advance that whatever he does will be met with approval, that he can evade adverse criticism by commanding silence, or by refusing to listen to what is said ? The hard work involved in ceremonies must turn the ceremonies of real work into an effort. If he has ordinary human intelligence, he must realise that the Minister, asking for his judgment, has a greater understanding than he has himself, for he has never studied any subject thoroughly. The dullness of his own "yes" or "no," the emptiness of the expression of his will, must create a disinterestedness which is hidden only by good manners.

Though the entire Court as well as the bourgeoisie were quite aware of this situation, the French continued to love the King as an

abstract principle, just as some people are in love with love rather than with a definite person. Even at the beginning of the great Revolution no republican party existed in France. And in 1748 Louis XV was not held responsible for the unfavourable outcome of the war against Maria Theresa. His ministers were to blame, his generals were to blame. A million human beings had been sacrificed during the war, not an inch of new territory had been won, and all this "*pour le roi de Prusse*," "*pour le méchant homme de Berlin*," who, despite his own gains, had not succeeded in preventing Maria Theresa from placing an imperial crown on her head. The most popular invective was, "You are as stupid as this Peace of Aix," but the stupid and unfavourable peace was attributed to the ministers and not to the King. As long as mistakes were not actually made in his name, if he left the people alone, they cheered him. Beaumarchais himself was not free from this feeling of devotion to the monarchy, even when he rebelled against the system by talking and writing against it. The sentimental persistence of his childhood loyalty, his fondness for his own feeling of respect, developed within him a devotion to the Monarchy; and though he himself often ridiculed this attachment, it persisted after the Revolution.

When, however, young Caron stood before the King for the first time, he was moved when Louis XV asked him "for the wonderful little watch." The young man was amazed. Men who discussed politics in the street were obviously right when they said that the King was merely ill-advised, that he himself was kindly disposed towards everyone, for had he not recognised him, Caron? Had he not shown him the honour of addressing him, because he had known that Caron-Fils had invented the "escape-movement"? It was pure calumny to say that the King was indifferent to the welfare of the people, or to claim that the extravagant luxury at the Court was ruining them.

An incredibly gracious and kindly gentleman accepted Caron-

Fils' tiny watch; then the ruler of France, whose very breath set a huge machine of State in motion, enquired about the mechanism of the small wheels and levers, about the co-ordination of the spirals and the plates which moved with every second which passed.

When the King asked him to explain the clock-work to him, the impudence of the Paris street urchin took possession of Pierre Augustin. His shyness had vanished. He quickly took his tools and his magnifying glass out of his pocket and adjusted the glass to his right eye—he was disappointed when the royal hand removed the glass from his eye with a rapid gesture. Louis XV wanted to see through this miracle of glass himself.

The King of France shook his head in surprise, he had seen that the small glass made the tiny wheels look huge. One *grand seigneur* after the other, dukes, ministers, governors, was told to put the glass to his eye and to convince himself that with the help of this magnifier it was not difficult to construct the tiniest watch. When, however, the King could not pick up the little wheels, which he had taken apart, with the small pliers, his face assumed an expression of boredom, and young Caron thought that he had incurred the royal displeasure.

In confusion he received the order to make another tiny watch. A courtier whispered to him: "For the Marquise de Pompadour," and then, walking backwards, it was time for him to go. He felt slighted when he saw that the King was already talking to the next man received in audience. Had his expenditures for the watch been in vain? Had the labour, and the far greater effort to obtain an audience, been wasted? He had received an order—was that all? Young Caron did not know the Court. When he had returned to the ante-room, he was suddenly surrounded by courtiers. Gentlemen with blue ribbons of their orders, with brilliant stars, their jabots decorated with glittering diamonds, were speaking to him: "Dear Monsieur Caron, you will make one for me first. . . ." And each one of them ordered a watch, exactly like the one he had

shown the King. They all wanted their watches as quickly as possible. The price did not matter.

If Pierre Augustin had known not only from hearsay but from experience what it was to be the fashion, he would have chosen one of the gentlemen round him. He would have told him that he would make only one watch, and that for him, if he, Pierre Augustin, would receive as payment a noble title, a country estate, in short, everything which a great gentleman in France could demand. Each of his wishes would have been granted.

As it was, taken utterly by surprise by this unexpected success, he accepted the orders, promised to deliver the watches as soon as he could, and hurried back to Paris to spread the news of his triumph and to enjoy it. The King's order for a watch for the Marquise de Pompadour won for him the title "Purveyor to the King." He at once ordered a sign with this inscription; in a letter to the *Mercure de France* he made very obvious propaganda for his new title. "I know of no higher ambition than to dedicate myself to the full development of my art."

He had become a privileged watchmaker. Day after day, his glass-walled workshop was visited by the hierarchy of Government officials, the less distinguished gentlemen followed the greatest, until finally, unimportant gentlemen honoured Caron-Fils, the watchmaker who had suddenly become fashionable, with their orders.

The day was not long enough for him to carry out all his orders. Each customer wanted to see this man who had won the King's favour; he could not escape from the workshop, and in the evening he was too tired to go out among pleasure-loving people and to enjoy life. His father would no longer have prevented him from going. After his success the old watchmaker allowed him to spend his time as he chose. There was one pleasure of which Pierre Augustin never deprived himself: he told everyone, who had not heard about his luck, every detail of his fortunate experience. He

wrote to his cousin in London. True, apart from his intention of winning his relative's admiration, he had an ulterior motive for writing. As he was now a great French watchmaker, he wanted to become a member of the Academy of Sciences in London. Perhaps, in free-thinking England, his lowly origin would be overlooked.

Pierre Augustin's hopes were thwarted by world politics. For the first time they interfered with his life. Not his middle-class origin, but his French nationality prevented his being honoured in London. The English people were not in the least Francophil. They still resented the fact that France had supported the Pretender's, Charles Edward's, efforts. And any attack on the ruling house of Hanover in favour of a Stuart was considered an attempt to undermine the parliamentary system which had been laboriously developed under the Hanoverian kings. The absolute monarchy seemed to endanger the civil rights which had been acquired with such difficulty. Besides, the tension between the two countries had been increased by their incompatible interests in the colonies, especially in North America. The London population was counting on a war. The French Ambassador at the English Court wrote to the Pompadour that he did not believe "that people in England seriously wanted a war." The diplomat based his assertion on "statesmanlike psychology"—but the declaration of war followed soon after his letter.

The war between England and France about America severed young Caron's connections with his cousin in London.

CHAPTER IV

PIERRE AUGUSTIN was sure that he would never have the patience to make a really important contribution as a watchmaker. It would take years to achieve anything notable, and his ambition left him no peace. Again and again he visualised the scene of the royal levée. His desire to attend it frequently, or daily, became an obsession, and he sought out the men who enjoyed this good fortune. He asked one gentleman questions, he tried to find out indirectly from another how he might achieve his aim. The answer never varied. It was very simple: he must buy himself an office at Court.

To do so, money was essential, but the sums mentioned were beyond the reach of even a well-established watchmaker. His honest earnings would never suffice to buy a post in the Royal Household. Only a woman could help him. This was the old idea of his youth. Pierre Augustin considered the wives of the more and less important office-holders of his acquaintance. Most of them were old and most unattractive; and he knew that they would never allow their daughters to marry the son of a craftsman. He therefore decided that he must attach himself to a married couple without children. He did not care what means he used to reach his goal. Whether he succeeded through a man or through a woman was immaterial to him.

Chance came to his rescue. A relatively handsome woman, who was older than he was, but whose husband had several posts in the Royal Household, frequently asked him to repair her watch—which was out of order conspicuously often—and to bring it to her home. If she had told young Caron frankly that she found him attractive, she would have succeeded more quickly. As it was, several invitations were necessary before Caron-Fils, “Purveyor to the King,” condescended to

deliver the watch himself; after all, it was beneath his dignity to do so.

Madame Franquet received him so graciously that he frequently went to see her when her husband was away. A clever plan then made it possible for him to meet Pierre Augustin Franquet, the Secretary of the Royal Kitchens and a Controller of the Military Chest. The fact that their names were the same appealed to this sickly man, and he was more delighted still by the young watchmaker's ability to amuse him. The husband was almost as pleased with Caron-Fils as was his wife. How wonderful it was that this young man called every evening, bringing with him into their quiet home the concentrated gaiety of Paris—the real and the artificial gaiety, which he had assiduously collected. The young man sang, he improvised tunes on the piano, and wrote his own verses. Monsieur Franquet felt as though he were a *grand seigneur* employing his own household poet, flute-player, and harpist. The gloomy atmosphere of the home suddenly gave way to jests, gay masquerades, and theatrical performances, which were so cleverly arranged that a duet sung by Madame Franquet and Pierre Augustin made the Secretary to the Royal Kitchens and the Controller of the Military Chest believe in a mere comedy of love. Monsieur Franquet thought that this talented young man should not be earning his living by manual labour. A man as versatile as he was should not be confined to a workshop. A man who used his mouth so well, who talked and sang, who was so musical, should not be a craftsman.

Madame Franquet agreed with her husband; she had every reason to think highly of young Caron's mouth and his vivacious temperament. Monsieur Franquet, who felt increasingly like a *grand seigneur*, decided to make a lordly offer to this young friend of their household—Franquet, of course, had no idea that he was more a friend of his wife than of the household. Yes, it must be Versailles; only by being there, as he was himself, could a man really

live. And he wished for his young friend a mode of life suitable to his talents. He told Caron that he would sell him the Secretaryship to the Royal Kitchens.

Franquet's willingness to sell his office to Caron is documented by a decree of the ninth of November, 1755, in which the King appoints as Pierre Augustin Franquet's successor Pierre Augustin Caron as Secretary of the Royal Kitchens. The King agreed to this appointment, because of the "favourable reports he had received about Monsieur Pierre Augustin Caron."

This document meant more than a piece of paper to young Caron. It meant that he—at least as long as he held this office—could discard his bourgeois clothing; he could dress like a gentleman. He would no longer go to Versailles merely as a sightseer or a chance visitor. Pierre Augustin exchanged the small glass work-room in which he had spent the first third of his life for another stage. His audience no longer consisted of the controlling commissioner of the Jewellers' Guild and the aristocratic and bourgeois passers-by in the Rue St. Denis; his new audience was the French Court and all of France which he represented. Pierre Augustin Caron, formerly "Watchmaker to the King," now marched stiffly, a sword at his side, into the dining-hall, behind two guards officers, the kitchen chef, the Lord High Steward, and Controller-General. He was followed by the meat-bearers, carrying silver dishes, which they did not place before His Majesty themselves. That was young Caron's duty. His poise was perfect when he lifted the covers from the tureens. With sure fingers, which did honour to his past as a watchmaker, he took up the meat and put it on His Majesty's plate. The son of the middle-class craftsman had become a courtier.

"Ambition," as one of young Caron's contemporaries defined it, "is nothing but the urge which prompts a man to place his own

personality in the desired relation to his surroundings." Pierre Augustin had too much imagination to be content with a humble life. He was not in the least dissatisfied with his attainments. When he was twenty-three he had been eminently successful in his trade; his first step into the great world of the Court had been equally fortunate. But could he stop, now that he had actually begun the career he had always contemplated? He soon realised that his office and his distinction were an illusion. His desire for activity was not satisfied by his few stiff steps from the ante-room into the King's dining-hall, where he performed the primitive function of serving food. His hand, eager to write—and his letters and verse came to him more easily than ever—resisted making pompous notes of the royal demand for meat. Besides, it irked him, when he went over his colleagues' notes, to see that they were becoming rich, while he, a newcomer, was living on his small salary.

In his free time he roamed about the passages and the courtyard of the Royal Household; he made acquaintances and played the flute or the harp in the officials' rooms. He assumed an innocent manner, when he told the secrets of one to gain the confidence of another. He exchanged the reports current in Versailles—later these reports, written down by chroniclers and diarists, were an exact picture of the life at Court. His faculty, which had developed early, of understanding a whole situation when he had heard merely an allusion to it, developed into perfection. In a few weeks he was justified in saying that he really knew the Court.

Looking back, the incidents in the Royal Household appear as trivial intrigues; at the time, however, they governed the day, they caused the French people to act or to despair. For it was important to know that the King now saw the Marquise de Pompadour only by day to discuss politics with her; that he spent his nights with women of doubtful reputation, recruited by his valet among the beauties whom one could buy in Paris, and

who were imprisoned, as in a harem, in a building which was called the Deer Park.

The “uniforms of these recruits” cost the State more than the equipment of the regular armies. France had not exerted herself for the American colonial war with England. An expeditionary force of five thousand men was sent out to help the sixty thousand French in America in their struggle against the English colonials, who were twenty times as strong as they were.

A new war was being prepared. Louis XV’s incalculable politics had changed. He had concluded an alliance with Maria Theresa against Frederick of Prussia, his former ally. No one knew why he had done so. Everyone thought that the Marquise de Pompadour had favoured this alliance.

Discontent was growing in France. Thousands of men, looking for work, poured into Paris from the provinces, which had been impoverished by high taxes and bad harvests. In Paris these men occasionally gathered together and organised revolts which were easily suppressed and which seemed unimportant. Danger was not imminent. But people who understood the situation used a popular phrase for these revolts. They called them “sheet lightning before the storm.” Some Frenchmen no longer calmly accepted the fact that large proportions of the population were suffering great poverty while vast sums were being spent on the luxury of the King and his entourage. Some aristocrats, as well as members of the bourgeoisie, were becoming anxious. The Marquis d’Argenson wrote at this time that “the Court is the grave of the Nation.”

Young Caron’s unlimited ambition prevented him from joining in the criticism spread by the discontented elements. He would not have believed the Marquise de Pompadour had she said to him instead of to a woman friend: “Since I came here, I have not

known six agreeable moments." Pierre Augustin was still imbued with the "envy of the ignorant mob," about which the Pompadour, now neglected as the King's mistress, but omnipotent as his friend and adviser, was complaining. "The splendour, the honour, magnificent trifles," which the former bourgeoisie already despised, continued to attract the simple craftsman's son. He was depressed by the unimportance of his own position. What was he, compared with the high officials of the State? He was nothing, an under-workman, whose bow they barely acknowledged. All his attempts to be accepted by them had failed. They remained aloof. Class differences seemed to separate him irrevocably from these great gentlemen. But Pierre Augustin was not discouraged. On the contrary, their reserve convinced him afresh that his scheme of life was right. Only a woman could bring about his ultimate rise in the world.

"From the moment when Beaumarchais appeared in Versailles, women were moved by his appearance. His slender, well-proportioned build, his regular features, his good complexion, the sureness of his eye, his self-assured manner attracted them. He seemed to move above his surroundings. Women were carried away by the strength he gave out, and which seemed to become inflamed when he saw them."

This eye-witness of young Caron's success at the Court assumes that he himself was not conscious of his own powers. But actually Pierre Augustin was fully aware of the impression he was making. This was one of his premeditated successes: he would win the men, despite their resistance, by words; he would capture the women by looking at them; in both cases he would invest his entire personality. Here and there he met other women, but he did not break off his relationship with Madame Franquet. He owed her his first small foothold at the Court. Before he gave her up, he wanted to acquire her husband's other office, that of a Controller of the Military Chest. This was a step higher. True, a man

in this position was not ennobled; when he was off duty he was not allowed to wear a sword or the red heels which differentiated an aristocrat from a humble bourgeois—but this position meant money.

The difference in dress was not only a superficial one. A man's dress determined the society in which he moved; it decided his career. A bourgeois was never permitted to forget that he could not go beyond a certain point; only when he was ennobled could he do so.

The deeds of investment of many offices which were sold automatically ennobled the purchaser. The sums required were beyond young Caron's imagination. Life in the watchmaker's shop had taught him to count money according to *livres* and not *louisdors*. Eight thousand, ten thousand *louisdors*, sums in six figures, huge amounts for a man whose salary as a Secretary to the Royal Kitchens was six hundred *livres* a year. Without Madame Franquet's encouragement he would never have consented to pay Monsieur Franquet five thousand five hundred *livres* a year for life for this position. At first he had not quite understood. Every year he was to pay nearly ten times as much as he earned? Where should he get this money? Did Monsieur Franquet think that he would make up the difference from irregular accounts as Secretary to the Royal Kitchens? Or did he believe that this young man's career would be so rapid that in the course of a year he would be able to raise the difference of almost five thousand *livres*? Madame Franquet relieved his anxiety: she was an experienced woman. She knew that the Court offered plenty of opportunities for making money.

Pierre Augustin, however, had no time to await an opportunity. A month after he had taken office as Secretary to the Royal Kitchens, he began to urge "the old man"—naturally with Madame Franquet's knowledge—to sell him the Controllership of the Military Chest as well. For this post, too, he offered Monsieur Franquet a life pension. If Pierre Augustin was to be in debt in any case, he might as well be in debt on a large scale. Besides—

Madame Franquet had explained this to him—a Controller of the Military Chest could charge the State for fictitious journeys of inspection. He could charge higher prices than those actually received for deliveries of goods, or he could include in his accounts deliveries which had never been made. He could thus make up the difference between his official salary and the pension he owed Monsieur Franquet.

Monsieur Franquet, however, was extremely comfortable as a Controller of the Military Chest. It was rumoured that a new war was imminent, and the Controllers' affairs were flourishing. Franquet did not care to lose his revenues from the armament trade even to please his young friend. Franquet had got rid of the troublesome Secretaryship of the Royal Kitchens. He was prosperous and no longer obliged to sit about Versailles until it was time to place the King's meat before him. Franquet moved happily to Verlegrand, an estate he had recently purchased. The pretentious manor-house was surrounded by land. One of these properties was called "le bois Marchais," another "Arpajon." The new landowner welcomed Pierre Augustin to the estate; Franquet was always glad to see the young man who had bought his office on such favourable terms, and who was such a pleasant companion for himself and for his wife. He wanted to become a Controller of the Military Chest? As Franquet did not want to lose Pierre Augustin, he did not refuse this suggestion at once. In due course, he said, he would sell this office to his young friend.

Time, however, was the most necessary factor in Pierre Augustin's plans; he needed time if he was to make the first payment of the pension punctually. An unexpected event relieved him of this obligation.

Unless a man's guilt is clearly stated in official records, or he himself makes a confession, historians cannot sit in judgment.

They can only weigh the evidence of rumours, and arrive at conclusions after studying contemporary documents. Public opinion was divided. Some people based their judgment on the following account: Pierre Augustin Caron went to Verlegrand on the night of the third of January, 1756. The gates to the house were closed. As he could not get in he spent the night in one of the outbuildings of the estate. That night, while he was looking for a place to sleep, he lost a boot. In the morning he wanted to pay his respects to his host, Monsieur Franquet. In the presence of the servants he found him dead, lying in a pool of blood.

No one made any direct accusations against the man who had walked about the estate by night and who had made such an early call in the morning, but according to some accounts young Monsieur Caron was perhaps not entirely innocent. His enemies declared that the sudden death of his creditor was very opportune.

His friends tell another version of this story. They tried to prove that Pierre Augustin derived no advantages from Franquet's death: on the contrary, the office of Controller of the Military Chest went to the male heirs of the Franquet family. The convenient mistress, who had been completely under Caron's influence, now became a most inconvenient bride who insisted on marrying him.

At any rate the letters which Pierre Augustin wrote to the mourning widow were not sad or sentimental. They concerned money matters, the factor in their relationship which interested him most. A small part of the "secret incomes" from the office of a Controller of the Military Chest could still be rescued for the widow. This correspondence reflects the fact that the Controllers of the Military Chest had organised syndicates to exploit the State Budget. Had Monsieur Franquet lived he could have claimed a working share of the capital of this syndicate. His former colleagues were firm with his widow, telling her that a man who had died was dead, and that it was against their rules to pay out a member's share after his death. Madame Franquet

was to mourn, not only her husband, but the money she had lost as well.

They had not counted on young Caron. He staged a comedy to get the better of the Controllers, who were so deaf to Madame Franquet's entreaties. He regretted that he had to remain behind the scenes as the stage manager and that he could not appear in the play himself. First he sent Madame Franquet forward into battle. She failed him. As Pierre Augustin had no one else in whom he could confide, he invented another person. Naturally this fictitious creature was a moralist by profession, a man who would be equal to moral argument: an abbé. He longed to masquerade as this abbé, but this would have been dangerous, as he might have been recognised. So he placed his abbé before a desk.

Monsieur Joly, one of the Controllers of the Military Chest, could not forget the letter he received from the Abbé d'Arpajon, a friend and adviser of Madame Franquet. Joly read and reread this extorting letter carefully, for the blackmail it contained was so cleverly worded that, superficially, it did not emerge. Two names were mentioned: d'Argenson, the Minister of War, and the Marshal de Noailles. The Abbé assured Joly that his two superior officers would undoubtedly be grieved to learn that the Controllers of the Military Chest were making money by fraudulent means. The Abbé had hit the nail on the head. Monsieur Joly was so stupefied by this blow that he immediately turned over the embezzled sum of nine hundred *livres* to Monsieur Caron, Madame Franquet's legal representative, who also identified himself as the representative of the Abbé d'Arpajon.

Arpajon? Was that not the name of one of the properties which Monsieur Franquet bought with his estates at Verlegrand? A beautiful name, a good name, or young Caron would not have chosen it to impress his adversaries. As the name had been so effective, he would have liked to keep it. But he was afraid that the rôle he had played in his comedy might become known.

He gave up this lovely name and married Madame Franquet as simple Monsieur Caron.

When, as her husband, he went over the deeds of her land, he discovered that he was not only married to the mistress of Arpajon, but that she owned another property called "le bois Marchais." He adjusted this name to his taste, and, duly installed as her husband, he called himself Pierre Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais.

Father Caron had been troubled when his son gave up his honourable trade for the idle life of the privileged classes at Court. He regretted that he could not be as severe with the man of twenty-three or -four as he had been with the lad of sixteen. All he could do was to make his son conscious of his dissatisfaction, to let him know that he, his father, considered his rise as his downfall. But when Pierre Augustin left his parents' house to move into the luxurious home his wife had prepared for him, the old man knew that his influence on his son was over. The education he had given him had been wasted. His efforts to make of his son at least a puritanical and moral, if not a religious, human being, had failed. In vain had been his hopes that the traditional trade would be carried on by his son and by his grandchildren. He married his daughter to a watchmaker, Lépine. He needed another assistant in the workshop, for his business had begun to flourish when his son became popular as a watchmaker.

Old Caron disapproved of everything Pierre Augustin did. A man of twenty-four who marries a woman ten years older than himself for her money? The old man was annoyed when he heard that his son had his own carriage, that he drove into the courtyard at Versailles like a great gentleman when he went to fulfil his high office. Old Caron was profoundly grieved, however, when he learned that Pierre Augustin had discarded the old family name, that, on the contrary, he repudiated it emphatically and wrote

angry letters when anyone called him Monsieur Caron instead of Monsieur de Beaumarchais.

His father's disapproval stimulated Pierre Augustin's ambition. The old watchmaker refused to admit that he had risen in the world : Pierre Augustin determined to force this recognition from his father. The new Monsieur de Beaumarchais—who was waiting impatiently for the moment when this would be his legal name—deeply regretted this estrangement from his family. His ambition to shine had developed among his sisters, and he felt an urgent need for them to acknowledge his brilliance. He comforted himself with the thought that a reconciliation with his family would come about quite naturally after he had achieved what he hoped to achieve. His father would not turn his back on him when he drove down the Rue St. Denis; his sisters would not ignore him. In the district he would no longer be ridiculed as the “nobleman by his own grace” when he had finally been ennobled.

His wife's fortune was not sufficient to make this possible at once. He continuously contemplated the possibilities of acquiring enough money, or of finding a protector, who could help him purchase the title of an aristocrat.

In the meantime, his sword at his side, and perfectly dressed, he frequented the cafés where philosophers met. He took part in their scholarly discussions and learned much from them. He longed to give his excellent mind something to think about, he wanted to avoid intellectual emptiness. He regretted that “he would remain a pupil all his life, as he had spent so little time at school.” He realised that in his rapid rise he had thought too much about himself and not enough about the world. He wanted to make up for this as quickly as possible.

Among the wealthy, it was the custom to search the bookshops for the newest publications, to be informed about the intellectual movements which were influencing the age. It was a thrilling time, when gradually, philosophy was coming into its own, when

Reason was being proclaimed as the new god. Pierre Augustin could not define Reason. What was Reason to him? The knowledge of the world, the knowledge of himself, the relative value of his own ego to the world about him? When he listened to the philosophers he appreciated the emptiness of his wish to be ennobled; he realised that all these aims, serving only his vanity, were meaningless. But vanity alone was not driving him on. He was prompted by one desire: to let his powers, his life, have full sway, unhampered by the weights of prejudice. No action seemed contemptuous if it would further his career.

He saw that the men representing the great ideas of the age neglected nothing which would confirm their importance in the eyes of the world. He watched these men whenever he had a chance. It struck him as strange when Monsieur Diderot and Monsieur d'Alembert, human beings who to him had been great intellectual conceptions, played chess in the *Café de la Régence* as men of flesh and blood. A group of curious spectators stood round them, following each of their moves, and repeating and admiring every word they uttered. Everything was concrete and tangible. Did a man's position in the world improve, if he improved and developed his own mind and character?

This was a new aim for Pierre Augustin, a new perspective for his future. But to attain this end he must study, he could not sink back lazily to enjoy the comforts of his well-equipped home.

Whenever Beaumarchais had a comfortable home, when his life was secure, when he had climbed on to a higher level of existence where he might have rested, he was suddenly compelled to go on. This urge came from his surroundings, from within himself. Plans of yesterday or the day before moved him forward into the morrow. The day itself seemed not to exist. His office, which degraded him into the mere imitation of a really

important courtier, was irksome. He was bored with his wife's dull remarks about love. She demanded that he spend his spare time with her, for she forgot that he was not intellectually free, and that he was busy. By nature licentious, a man who had wandered about the market-places and the theatrical booths, he could not be content with a sentimental woman who suddenly seemed more like Monsieur Franquet's respectable widow than like the wife of Monsieur de Beaumarchais. Though she used rouge and dressed with care, she belonged to an older generation. "Ungrateful man, you will be responsible for my death." He had ceased to read the letters with which she besieged him. She wanted him to be faithful to her. He believed that, by giving her himself, he had long since compensated her for the money she had spent on him. Despite this attitude, he neglected to register their marriage agreement, thus legally establishing their joint property. He succumbed to bouts of recklessness as a periodical drinker succumbs to alcohol. Sometimes he tried to numb his tormenting restlessness by nervously studying Latin; in other moods he sought relief in luxury. He longed to make up for the dual shortcomings of his middle-class upbringing: he wanted to educate himself intellectually as well as in the art of living.

As the husband of a rich woman he was surprised by her death, and he was suddenly poorer than he had ever been before. Even the lawyer representing his interests and defending him against his wife's relatives who were proceeding against him, was astonished by the calm manner in which he accepted her loss. He was accused of murdering first the husband, and then Madame Franquet for their money. Actually, nothing was left from his association with the Franquets but his small office at the Court, a straw to which he clung—and the new name with which, despite the attacks against him, he was determined to win fame. His sudden poverty meant a new situation. Without fear, he faced this situation, and he was filled with a strange curiosity.

CHAPTER V

WHEN he became poor Beaumarchais was left with a liability which at first weighed down upon him: his debts. But these debts, forcing him to live like a rich man so that his creditors would not be uneasy, furthered his career. His debts prevented him from sinking back into the humble surroundings of his parents' home. His tailor would wait as long as he owned a carriage, and the man of whom he bought his oats was patient because he was well dressed. Unless he wanted to go into bankruptcy, he had to maintain an illusion of wealth.

He soon realised that other men in Paris were able to live well merely because they showed self-assurance. A large circle of men and of women—an army of parasites, who lived on the admiration and praise they gave the rich—were received by the aristocracy because of the good manners they had so quickly acquired. The aristocracy wanted to be amused. Every rich man, every aristocrat hoped to imitate the Royal Household. Like His Majesty, these gentlemen enjoyed surrounding themselves with guests who were socially beneath them. The tables in the great houses were laid for these parasites, but no one was asked to dine unless he was well dressed and had the proper bearing. Individuals wanting to play a part in this rather dubious society needed an opportunity for demonstrating their social talents, or of proving that they were artists or at least good amateurs. This was not difficult for Beaumarchais.

He had acquired a knowledge of persons and places as a boy; it was not necessary for him to ask whose household was the most select, who were his host's friends, what connections he had, how far-reaching they were, and what benefits he, Beaumarchais, could derive from this association—Beaumarchais knew the answers to these questions.

On his social ascent Beaumarchais decided to stop at the house of Madame de Pompadour's first husband. True, Monsieur Lenormant was never reconciled to the loss of his wife, a loss which seemed all the greater because she had become the most highly prized treasure of the greatest gentleman in France. But Lenormant tried to overcome the emotional emptiness inflicted upon him by her unfaithfulness. He played cards and he loved the stage. He looked for companions who would share these hobbies. He was so wealthy that he could imitate the Court on a large scale. When the Marquise de Pompadour, who now managed the great stage at Versailles, had been Madame Lenormant, she had built a small theatre at Etoiles, her country estate. Her husband equipped this stage magnificently. He engaged his favourite actors and arranged performances of the plays he liked. He was not only interested in those which were popular in Paris. The heterogeneous audience, Monsieur Lenormant's guests, was hungry for sensations. They demanded original, spicy, and unique fare. Every guest, who was not invited because of his rank or his great name, but because of his gifts, had to demonstrate these talents. Poets and writers were expected to write, musicians played or sang, men and women who could act performed on the stage. The guests without artistic abilities were expected, at least, to be talented when it came to applauding the others; they were expected to be convincing and convinced that the theatre at Etoiles could easily have competed with that at Versailles, if such a test had been possible. This contest with Versailles was purely theoretical. None of the great gentlemen, copying the King's mode of life, were conscious that their impulse to imitate him was a forerunner of the Revolution. This imitation narrowed the distance which separated the King from his subjects. In unpolitical circles new centres of interest were created in France, whereas Louis XV believed that his people should be concerned only with himself, as absolute Monarch, and with his Court.

Monsieur Lenormant was not content only with the plays by the Court dramatists, who wrote for the theatre at Versailles. He wanted to see other plays as well, original plays; he liked a change. In Etoiles the plays of the market booths became fashionable. To produce them properly a stage-manager was needed who was familiar with the customs and the dialect of the people. At first Beaumarchais hesitated. But when he realised that he could not yet compete with educated men in their own domain, men who knew Racine and Corneille by heart, who had read Cr  billon and Voltaire, he decided to exploit his knowledge of the annual fairs, for he must distinguish himself at all costs. Without an effort he made notes for ribald comedies, farces, and episodes, based on plots which he had actually experienced or which he had heard in his youth. Then he wrote plays suitable for Monsieur Lenormant's stage. He was concentrating on his career; wondering how he would rise in the world, how he would shine as an organiser of entertainments. He then surprised himself by discovering that he possessed a gift which would have given other men, from the day on which they became aware of it, a basis for life, for a remarkable career.

Not only did he write verses and letters with graceful ease. More than that: without a conscious effort, scenes, dramatic situations, sprang up in his mind as though from some mysterious force. He developed within himself to perfection the art of constructing plays, this mysterious form of mathematics based on human gestures and human impulses, on words and motions. But he wasted this great gift on profane subjects. He allowed his intellect to appear as a clown in a menagerie, as a buffoon, brought forward to amuse the crowd, a jester, who strikes his own face to make the spectators laugh and applaud.

In his function as an entertainer he did not confine himself to literature, which he degraded. His musical knowledge and ability, his brilliant memory for anecdotes, his talent for telling stories, for

being witty without being unkind, his gift for irony which did not offend—all these gifts made him conspicuous.

Soon he was a popular guest. He stopped and thought. Had he again reached the crossing of the ways ? Applause had increased his self-assurance.

When he was alone, however, he felt regret because he was neglecting his education, because he was unable, like the philosophers, to say one word with quiet dignity, one word which would earn for him more applause than the thousand words he was forced to recite before his spectators clapped their hands and cheered him.

He had often heard about the *salons* which were maintained in honour of one distinguished man. Women among the aristocracy, bored with frivolous amusements, cultivated philosophers and poets more carefully than they did their lovers. Beaumarchais decided to become a philosopher. He gave himself a course of self-education. His manuscripts indicate that he collected and translated Latin proverbs; that he pondered philosophical theories and tried to explain them. But the long periods between the dates on the yellow documents show that again and again he strayed from the path of pure intellect and resumed a frivolous life.

He needed some relief; life was too difficult. His small salary as Secretary to the Royal Kitchens was not sufficient to pay his debts, and his creditors were impatient. Something must happen. But what : And above all, when ? The payment of his debts could not be indefinitely postponed. His post consisted of dunning letters. Whenever there was a ring at his door, creditors stood outside, and they were no longer satisfied because he was well dressed, because he drove in his own carriage. Witty remarks no longer impressed them, and they were determined to tolerate this delay no longer.

His disastrous situation brought about a reconciliation between

Beaumarchais and his father. This reconciliation, which occurred at his mother's death-bed, was at first superficial, and meant only a temporary relief of his financial difficulties. Despite the efforts of his efficient son-in-law, Father Caron had not turned his workshop into an industrial establishment—he continued to hope that his runaway son would return, and for this reason he did not frighten him off by sermonising to him.

Beaumarchais' humble home was a moral support. He was amused because his two sisters in Spain had not become millionairesses, because his sisters in Paris were not Madame de Pompadours, even in a very small way. He had predicted this, and it stimulated him afresh to realise that the family hopes were once more centred on himself. His sisters knew that his debts were worrying him, and his cheerfulness astonished them. Was it insincere, assumed? His thoughtfulness, which was developing with his genius, was not always concealed behind the unfailing smiles of the pseudo-aristocrat. His sisters were aware that he was making plans. Did his confidence in the future have the assurance of prophecy? They wondered what could possibly happen to place their financially ruined brother, this professional idler and scoundrel, into a position of wealth and prominence overnight. They enquired about his intentions—he did not answer—he did not tell anyone of his one last hope, his one chance: to rise in the world because some woman loved him.

The women of Beaumarchais' acquaintance could not help him. He was aware that, though he was living well, he was not moving in good society. The women of the *demi-monde* expected their lovers to do something for them, and not the other way round. Of course, there were gentlemen of doubtful character—the Comte Jean Dubarry, for instance—who were wealthy. Whenever he needed money he sent a mistress to some wealthy man. Dubarry

needed a great deal of money—and he had many mistresses. But Beaumarchais was not attracted by this manner of earning a living; it was repulsive to a man of his temperament. It seemed to him lacking in imagination; a quick and unsavoury way of making money. The women he knew might cost him money, but he did not want to make money through them. Should he marry again? Charm a wealthy widow? One marriage had been quite enough for him. He loathed all pettiness. As though by an inspiration from heaven his imagination was suddenly arrested by the thought of Princess Adelaide—this was the dream of his boyhood.

Mesdames de France, Louis XV's four daughters, who lived apart from the Court, intrigued him. That was where he must begin with his plan. The four Princesses were bored. Everyone said that. They were the same ages as his sisters and himself. He knew that unmarried girls, who are no longer very young, feel an uncontrollable desire to pass the time—not taken up by a man—with new and changing occupations.

He studied the Princesses' habits at a distance. He drew smaller and smaller concentric circles round this bored island in pleasure-loving Versailles. He recalled what he knew about them. Etiquette made it impossible for them to take part in unofficial amusements. Their walks in the Versailles Park were confined to the prescribed roads, and to special hours. At other fixed times, their father came to see them, but he rarely stayed more than a few minutes. Their entire day was adjusted to this visit. In the evening, they were summoned to pay their respects to His Majesty, a proceeding which again took only a fraction of the time at their disposal. Actually they were prisoners in the magnificent palace, which held no splendour for them. Their apartments were luxurious, huge sums were spent on their kitchens, but no one at Court thought them

worth while, no one believed that these unmarried Princesses who were no longer young could be of the slightest influence at Court.

An economy measure had determined their existence in their earliest youth. At a time when the Court was experiencing financial difficulties, Cardinal Fleury, Louis XV's tutor and first Minister, decided to send them to a strict convent. The King's Household Budget was thus relieved of the large expenditures for ladies-in-waiting, ladies of the bedchamber, and the swarm of servants whom the Princesses' household would have required. Ten years later they returned from the convent, where they had hardly learned to read and write, and where the poor, narrow life had shaken their nerves.

The nicknames chosen by the King for his daughters—he called the eldest one "sow," the second "rag"—did not increase their prestige. Nevertheless, Beaumarchais, resolved to gain influence through a woman, decided to win the favour of these four women. His calculations were correct. At Court, and among the people, it was said that the King would send away his mistresses, that he might even give up the Marquise de Pompadour's friendship, if his own family were more amusing, if he could talk to his own daughters, if, in short, they could have replaced the Marquise in any way.

To attain extraordinary ends, a man must desire the extraordinary. Beaumarchais interpreted the life at Court from the point of view of the life in his own family. As Father Caron grew older, he enjoyed his daughters' singing; the gossip they repeated to him began to interest him; he was pleased when they had guests; he approved of their musical efforts. In brief, he welcomed young people who made his home more cheerful. Why should not Beaumarchais achieve this appreciation for the daughters of the King? If he could gain the favour of the four unfortunate and lonely girls, living so close to the throne, he would also win the King. He would see the King daily; every day he would have the

opportunity of making himself liked and of being noticed. Ultimately he would not be useful merely as an entertainer; he would be needed for some serious office. For Beaumarchais knew that he was capable of fulfilling any office, any service which might be assigned to him. His own feeling of power, a feeling which drove him on, made him quite sure of his own abilities.

When he played with this idea, he sometimes thought it must remain a fantasy, a wish-dream which could never be realised. But the dreams of men of genius often reflect the future. As a thirteen-year-old boy, when he heard that the King had discovered his daughter Adelaide with a pornographic book, the Princess's image had haunted him during the day. In his imagination he was raised above his humble station and became her equal. Fairy tales are important in the minds of almost all adolescents. He saw himself standing opposite the Princess; he had been introduced to her by some gentleman whom he had met by chance and who had taken a fancy to him. Was this reality or a wish-dream? When Beaumarchais left the Princess's apartments, he wondered whether he was dreaming. How had he got there?

A casual conversation with the Duc de Lavallière, whom he had met at a gay party; another guest who had mentioned that Beaumarchais was the best harpist he knew; then it had occurred to the Duke that Princess Adelaide wanted to know about this new instrument. Nothing more and nothing less, after he had been presented to them for the first time, had made him the music-master of the four Princesses. He was asked what salary he wanted. Salary? He said that he was not a professional music-teacher. He declined a salary.

Daily, after the levée, Monsieur de Beaumarchais, his face reflecting his happy mood, appeared in the Princesses' apartments. Here he was at first met by four ill-humoured, not very young, girls whom he was to amuse.

He began by looking at them kindly and by doing his duty at



PRINCESS ADELAIDE

Taken from a painting by Jean Marc Nattier

(Photo . F Bruckmann A G)

the harp and at the music desk. This was a domain which could not be captured with reckless haste. Loneliness, and especially boredom, make people suspicious. Beaumarchais, a natural psychologist, this man who could judge every situation in advance, had decided that he must not declare himself until he was familiar with the characters of the Princesses, with their habits and their inclinations. He must act like a plant, grown solely to please the eye. Their eyes must become accustomed to seeing him, while as their music-master he dominated their ears. He must not seem to have too many talents, or too few. Princess Adelaide's hand must touch his quite casually at the instrument, he must remain unembarrassed, while he observed that she was confused. When they asked him a question, he must say enough so that they would not be bored, but he must never be forward. He must not let any of the Princesses think that he preferred another, yet each of them must believe that she was his favourite, that this extremely handsome, elegant young man was teaching her music for her sake alone. For they knew that he was not employed as their teacher, that he was not paid for his services. Besides, he must make a good impression on the ladies-in-waiting and on the ladies of the bedchamber. One look of disapproval, one unkind word from one of them, and he might be dismissed. Apart from this, he had to pacify his creditors, and yet the Princesses, who knew nothing about money, must not think that he was without means or worried.

Anyone seeing this modest young music-master going to Versailles every day to perform his duties would not have credited him with the audacious intention of winning a Princess's favour. He suffered when he imagined that he might not succeed, that he might not impress fat Victoire, beautiful Adelaide, hunch-backed Louise, dull Sophie. He avoided other women in order to conserve his energy for this four-leaved clover which was to make his fortune. He was suddenly aware that his presence made the dead

atmosphere of the Princesses' apartments curiously alive. He noticed that two of them exchanged whispered remarks about him when he spoke to the other two, and when he bowed and addressed one of them—not too long so that the others would not be annoyed—each of them showed womanly agitation. He played with their nerves as he did with the strings of the harp; his touch was subtle and sensitive, he moved forward with extreme caution. He was obsessed by the strategy of success, by the thought: they must forget that they are of royal blood and that I am a bourgeois who is in debt for everything he owns, including the clothes he is wearing.

To convince himself that he was indispensable, he once stayed away. A few hours after the usual time for his voluntary service, a messenger, bathed in perspiration, pulled the bell at his door. He was the *estafette* from Versailles with a letter from the Princesses' first lady of the bedchamber asking why he had not come. The Princesses were anxious about him.

The next day he was received more graciously than he had been before. His absence had aroused their desire to talk about him. They praised his modesty, his dignity, the fact that he could answer any questions, that he was well informed about subjects other than music. And the ladies of the bedchamber, for whom he always had a respectful word or bow, joined in this praise of him. He had been missed, and he was now received, not by four Princesses, but by four women friends.

They began to question him about his life. He told them, in carefully chosen words, about his sisters, about Paris. He adjusted these anecdotes to their intelligence. He was imperturbably gay; but his gaiety did not reflect an evenness of nature; instead they felt that he was a restrained and self-controlled man.

Soon the Princesses did not want to confine their lessons to the harp. He played the flute. With pointed lips, he whistled merry tunes into the vast rooms lined with brocade. These brocades had never before muffled the sound of such music, and the four Prin-

cesses were carried away by his happy mood. He was their gay entertainer, a friend, who helped them pass their empty hours—and in their dreams he was a man.

When Beaumarchais and the four women were together, an indissoluble web separated them from the Court. They confided in him, they asked his advice. And so that he would be asking theirs as well, he invented problems for the solution of which he needed the wise judgment of *Mesdames*.

He became their avowed favourite. Soon the Princesses were not bored and ill-tempered when their father came to see them. The King, coming from an *affaire d'amour* in the Deer Park, and irritated by the prospect of his family duties, was received by gay whistling. His daughters greeted him with the new popular tunes. He began to enjoy seeing them.

His Majesty's interest in *Mesdames* caused the entire Court to pay more attention to them. High dignitaries of State, who had avoided this wing of the Palace, who had been lax about paying their respects to the Princesses, inscribed their names at the door-keeper's and asked to be received. Princes of high birth, Ministers, the Marshals of France, everyone, in fact, who had any influence at Court, now came to see them.

Beaumarchais did not over-estimate the benefits he himself would derive from this situation. He must hold his own, not only with the Princesses, but with the ladies and gentlemen who had joined their circle. He must strengthen his friendship with *Mesdames*, with all four of them or with one of them.

He grew bolder. It was increasingly obvious that the most normal of the four, Princess Adelaide, was becoming attached to him, that she was "not quite indifferent to him." He began to work out a plan which would ultimately bring him closer to her. In Russia, Empress Elizabeth's favourites had become princes. He

would have been satisfied if Adelaide and her sisters had given him the legal right to use his aristocratic name. He knew from the courtiers' manner that he had risen in their estimation, though he had not yet been ennobled. But he was very bourgeois by temperament, so that he longed to be officially raised to an aristocratic rank. One day, while he was playing the harp for the Princesses, the doors were opened hurriedly. The King entered. Beaumarchais pretended that he was absorbed by his music and did not rise. Then he rose, as though in sudden confusion and bowed deeply. The King pressed him down on to his chair with a light hand, telling him to go on playing.

This incident was discussed in the Palace. Now even the highest officials honoured Beaumarchais by speaking to him. The Dauphin came to see his sisters more frequently than before. The young man liked this man of his own age; he often questioned him about the feeling among the people, and asked his opinion. The Dauphin was delighted "finally to talk to someone who told him the truth."

Beaumarchais, now the Princesses' trusted friend as well as their music-teacher, was frequently asked to do errands for them. An old voucher shows that he loaned the "daughters of France" money, that he had books bound and music copied for them. This was less easy for him than they knew. Every day he faced a fresh problem. Thirty-six *livres* to-day, sixty *livres* to-morrow. Where should he get this money? Princess Victoire was the most presumptuous. She had an annual income of a million *livres*, and she did not guess how difficult it was for him to get a few silver coins whenever she besieged him with her requests to do an errand. He appreciated the honour of being allowed to spend money for *Mesdames*, but he knew that he could not do so much longer. His financial crisis made the situation tragi-comic. Half laughing, half in despair, he wondered: "What is honour without money?"

PART II

THE ARISTOCRAT AS A BOURGEOIS

CHAPTER I

WHILE Beaumarchais, struggling with his petty financial problems, wondered whether he should confide in the Princesses, the greatest French financier, Paris Duverney, was watching him. Duverney, a sound judge of human nature, realised that the young man, though pretending that money did not matter, was in serious difficulties. The quiet courtier, whose manner was consistently modest, was actually waiting for an opportunity like a beast of prey. This ambitious man was not satisfied with empty honours; the consideration showed him by the Princesses, the Dauphin, and the King was not enough. The philosophy of content which he affected was insincere. This, by the way, is the attitude towards life usually displayed by philosophers.

Duverney's experiences with the simplicity of poets and philosophers had not been fortunate. He had given Monsieur Voltaire his first glimpse into the financial world and this glimpse had enabled him to obtain an annual pension of thirty thousand *livres*. He had not thanked Duverney; instead, when Voltaire was asked to tell a story about rogues, he began with the words: "Once there was a man of finance . . ."

Duverney's assistance to Voltaire was not a philanthropic gesture. Great financiers instinctively recognise genius just as they appreciate a favourable opportunity for business. Duverney had foreseen Voltaire's popularity, and his friendship for him had been a good investment. The banker also foresaw Beaumarchais' future distinction. He felt intuitively that the Princesses' music-master, this watchmaker and inventor, this entertainer of society, would, one day, with a clown-like jump, place himself outside the menagerie, that he would then be seated with the other spectators in the audience.

The financier's stubborn resistance to the John Law's Bank which

issued notes, had proven his knowledge of human nature and of situations. Duverney's fortune had been small at the time, but he did not yield to the temptation of acquiring wealth in paper currencies. He and his three brothers were the only financiers in France who protested against the new currency. It did not deter Duverney when others became rich and called him old-fashioned because he preferred gold pieces to printed paper. He hoarded gold; he submitted to being imprisoned in the Bastille. He was imperturbed, for he was sure that, one day, he would represent the Monarchy's financial interests. Everyone was madly changing money into the new currency, but he believed in the ultimate re-establishment, in the permanency, of the old financial values. During the financial delirium, brought about by John Law's Joint-stock Bank, during the months when figures soared wildly, he and his brothers remained calm. They had their reward. After the crash of the John Law's Bank and of the East India Company, the Paris brothers were asked to investigate and organise the vast "estate" left by these organisations.

Percentages of the one and a half million *livres* which they liquidated flowed into their private fortune. The brothers' business, which had begun in a small way—they had each been a potboy in their father's public-house—now encircled all of France. They divided amongst themselves the invisible kingdom of money and credits, a kingdom which they had created together. They differed from the Rothschild brothers, whose united fraternal efforts exploited the opportunities of their age a century later, in that they were nationalists. France was the domain of their wealth, they confined their enterprises to their own country.

Their influence was all the greater because none of them sought prominence, none of them wanted to be ministers of State. They preferred invisible power to visible insignia of office. They employed clever agents; they knew of every intrigue to defeat their interests, and they were able to prevent such disasters. When the

political situation made war seem inevitable, the brothers bought up all available armament materials and foodstuffs, and then offered their services as an indispensable source of supply to the military administration. They had an army of spies in the ministries of foreign Powers, and they were told when it was time for them to take action. Every world event increased their wealth, but they were not content to profit only by extraordinary developments. One of the brothers, who called himself Paris-Montmartel, was a banker to the Court; and Paris Duverney, the adviser to the Ministry of War, controlled the lumber trade of France.

The brothers were omnipotent when Poisson's, their employee's daughter, became the King's mistress. From that time onwards they were admitted freely to the King's apartments. Paris Duverney's friendly relations with the Pompadour are reflected in contemporary documents. "You stupid old thing," she addressed the elderly man in her letters to him. He supervised her financial affairs, he financed her political and her philanthropic activities. He loaned her huge sums, but he knew that she would pay back every loan with interest and interest on interest.

Duverney did not exploit his position to attain a higher social rank, he had no desire to boast with an aristocratic title. He remained what he had been at the beginning of his career: simple Monsieur Paris Duverney.

He represented the rising bourgeoisie, and a feeling that the power of money would one day be the greatest power of history made him prefer it to the insignia of rank. He maintained friendly relations with aristocrats, and arranged for his nieces and nephews to be received by them as their equals, but he himself remained a simple citizen.

The Seven Years' War was unfortunate for Duverney. With the Pompadour's assistance, and acting for her, he had helped to

bring about the alliance between Louis XV and his former enemy Maria Theresa. It was a logical idea to terminate the hostilities between the houses of Habsburg and Bourbon, hostilities which had lasted a century, by an alliance. This union between France, one Catholic Great Power, and Austria, the other Catholic Great Power, seemed to guarantee the peace of Europe. The resistance of the Protestant Powers, England and Prussia, would be short and futile. But the signers of this alliance, the King in Versailles, and the Empress in Schönbrunn, had not reckoned with Pitt's remarkable statesmanship or with Frederick the Great's military genius. Their advisers were equally unsuspecting of their adversaries' talents.

Duverney had established himself, not only as contractor to the military authorities; his desire for power caused him to interfere in the internal administration of the Army as well. He had favoured the appointment of certain field-marshals, who had not been efficient. He had outlined plans of strategy in the boudoir of his friend, the Marquise de Pompadour. The French Armies collapsed. He mourned his lack of ability as a misfortune. But his prestige had suffered because of his mistakes, and he was called the "flour-general." His influence had decreased, and even the Pompadour dared not defend him. Her friendship for him was generally known. She could not risk admitting that she was co-operating with him, though actually she was now concerned with an old project in which she was particularly interested.

On her behalf he had founded a military academy, which was to be a counterpart of St. Cyr, the institution founded by the Marquise de Maintenon. The King's mistress, as well as the King himself, wanted to compete with the shadow of a splendid past. But neither the age nor its chief actors in France were as great as their predecessors.

Despite his efforts, the financier had not succeeded in persuading a member of the Royal Family, least of all Louis XV himself, to

become the patron of Madame de Pompadour's new institution. The King was aware that this meant a great deal to his beloved friend, but he pretended that he had not heard about the military academy. He disliked friction in his own family. The Princes and Princesses of royal blood opposed the Pompadour's desire to imitate the Maintenon. Louis XIV had ultimately married his Marquise—the members of the Royal Family hoped to prevent his successor from following this example; they did not want the Poisson to persuade him to marry her.

There was apparently no hope that the military academy, still privately administered by Duverney, would be transferred to the personal guardianship of the King. If the financier had been merely ambitious he would have given up his project. But his real anxiety was an open secret: times were bad, and he had to prove to himself, to the Pompadour, to the entire Court, that he had not lost prestige, that his career was not over. He was at his post. He demanded of his agents detailed accounts of the relative strength of the various factions at Versailles. He knew the names of everyone who was in favour with the King, the Dauphin, or the Princesses. *Mesdames'* friend was the only new name on the horizon.

When Beaumarchais strolled through the ante-rooms, or the stables, or when leaning out of the window, gazing enchanted at the autumnal splendour of the park, and almost forgetting the ghost of bankruptcy which loomed ahead, he was often told that Paris Duverney was interested in him. Sometimes an acquaintance mentioned this fact, sometimes a *valet de chambre* or an official at the Court made some remark; occasionally an equerry stepped up to him and mentioned Duverney casually in the course of a hurried conversation. Beaumarchais did not respond to these whispered comments, these mysterious messages. He pretended not to know who Duverney was.

His assumed indifference excited the elderly financier. Had he sunk so low that this insignificant street musician rebuffed his confidential messengers? Or—? He wondered. He was pleased by a possibility which had occurred to him. His own rise to power had been harsh and difficult; since his earliest childhood he himself had practised the art of dealing successfully with other people. Did this lad, who understood each lever, spring, or wheel of a clock, think it wiser to be outwardly indifferent, to hold himself aloof until a relation was actually established between himself and the capital he needed?

Duverney decided to wait.

The rich man's stubborn patience was a difficult test for Beaumarchais. He had sold his office as Secretary to the Royal Kitchens. The sum he received had vanished almost instantly—one drop of water on a hot stone. His financial straits had made him gamble, and he had been a failure at cards. His creditors pressed him continuously, and he could think only of money. Yet he knew that one line from Duverney's pen would end his economic distress. He knew what the banker expected of him. He reconstructed Duverney's process of reasoning. Duverney wanted the Princesses' friend to persuade them to inspect the military academy. If he awakened *Mesdames'* enthusiasm, they, in turn, would urge the King to visit the academy. And if Louis XV once acknowledged the existence of this nationally important institution, he could not withhold his patronage.

How much was this service worth? Beaumarchais had no money, but he contemplated his future meeting with Duverney, estimating the sum he could demand for his services. If he took the initiative, he would receive less. He must remain firm, if he was to exploit this opportunity properly. He must not go to see Duverney until the banker had asked him to come.

He continued to perform his playful duties, waiting for a lucky chance to bring about an encounter with Duverney. But the

days passed; and he realised that the equerries, the officials, and the *valets de chambre* ceased to mention Duverney to him. As he was desperate, he finally decided to anticipate the banker's wishes.

As soon as he could, he told the Princesses about the military academy. They listened graciously to everything he told them, to any subject he broached. They granted his every wish before he had expressed it in words. They were to inspect the new military academy? That would be amusing. The Princesses were willing to go.

A few days later Beaumarchais "happened" to meet one of the financier's agents. He stopped him, and told him casually that he, Beaumarchais, had already done his part. He had assumed, he said, that Monsieur Duverney wanted to know him because he could arrange for the Princesses to inspect the military academy. *Mesdames* were awaiting the formal invitation.

Beaumarchais' move had been excellent. It was not necessary for him to go to Duverney's Palace. Duverney came to him to thank him.

All went well. The Princesses and the Dauphin visited the military academy. During the ceremony, the watchmaker's son was awarded an honour, of which the greatest gentlemen of France might have been envious. Madame Adelaide, who was tired from the long tour of inspection, asked for his arm. Arm in arm with the King's daughter, he paraded through the courtyard of the military academy, where five hundred pupils belonging to the oldest families of France were lined up and standing at attention.

This public distinction did not turn Beaumarchais' head. On the contrary, he was more modest than ever. But this trivial incident furthered his plan to make the King, too, inspect the academy. He suggested to Princess Adelaide that as she had been too tired to go over the entire academy, she might ask the King to

visit it. Then she would have an opportunity of seeing what she had missed. He told her that she must come again with her father and the entire Court; it would be showing Duverney too much attention if she returned alone.

The King was so happy in the gay atmosphere which Beaumarchais had created in his daughters' apartments that he habitually asked them what they had been doing. He enjoyed their account of the military academy. Instead of friction in the family—there would be harmony. He could give his daughters and the Marquise a pleasure at the same time. A few days later Duverney's success was complete. He had attained his end: the academy which he had founded was placed under the patronage of the King. The entire Court witnessed the transfer when the "adopted sons of the aristocracy," heretofore the simple financier's charges, became the adopted sons of Louis XV.

Beaumarchais, too, had a new father. He wrote: "Monsieur Duverney swears that he will treat me like a son. He has pledged himself to make me happy."

The financier's overwhelming gratitude sprang not so much from a grateful heart as from a calculating brain. Beaumarchais had accomplished in a few days what he had attempted in vain for years. The young man would be equally useful on other occasions. Beaumarchais had acted without demanding securities in advance. Duverney rewarded this confidence and the services rendered with an annual income of six thousand *livres*.

Beaumarchais paid his debts with the first instalment of his new income, and he knew that henceforth he would be free from financial worries. He decided to be natural in the presence of this experienced man; frank confidence would bind Duverney to him. Now that Beaumarchais had money, he realised that he had needed more than economic assistance; his urge for activity was unsatisfied. The "new" surroundings had ceased to be new; he had observed the Court for too long, it had become a habit. He

was looking for a new aim, a new rôle, a new profession, a new world in which he could make himself felt. If anyone could show him the way it was Duverney.

His friendship for the financier gave Beaumarchais' life the desired change. Everything which he had experienced heretofore was on another plane—though in the same space. The splendour at Court, which had impressed him profoundly, was based on debts, on credit, on money. The courtiers, in their gold-braided coats decorated with precious stones, could only drive to Versailles in their gilded coaches because they were in debt, because they had credit, or because they had succeeded in borrowing money. The ladies at Court chose lovers who went into debt for them, who obtained credit, and who spent money lavishly. The entire mechanism of the Court rested on a bridge of debts, a bridge which led from the labour of the people to the poverty of the people. Money was everything in life. High officers hoped to be Marshals of France, not because they respected the Marshal's staff, but because the income was larger. The Prime Minister wanted to be Lieutenant-General of the Swiss Guards, because this post would have brought him two hundred thousand *livres* a year. The desire for money governed the entire Court.

After Beaumarchais talked with Duverney people seemed different. Formerly he had judged them according to their ability to further his career; now he thought of them in terms of money. He wondered how they might help him to make a fortune.

To become rich was his purpose in life. When a man is resolved to be wealthy, his imagination shows him new possibilities. His own person seems more valuable, as he himself is successful. He subjected himself to Duverney, who made use of this happy relationship with *Mesdames*, and who encouraged their

friendship for him. He brought the amenities of wealth to the Princesses' apartments, fruits and flowers from Duverney's hot-houses, and he placed the vast credit of the financier at the disposal of the "daughters of France." Duverney compensated Beaumarchais for the various attentions he showed the Princesses in the banker's name, and the bond between the two men was strengthened.

A very foppish young man was seen more and more often in the offices of the large Paris business houses. For a newcomer he showed remarkable insight. He offered to buy the grain harvest of an entire district; he agreed to supply a merchant with so-and-so many yards of cloth; sometimes he paid for his goods in cash, sometimes he himself accepted drafts in payment.

This young business man, who astonished Paris industrialists and merchants by his cleverness, seemed to have plenty of money and credit at his disposal. Their information service was not well organised, or they would have known that he was employed by Paris Duverney. They only knew that he was the Princesses' favourite. Nor did they care who he was; it was enough that he bought their goods, or sold them the commodities they needed; for the payment was in cash and the deliveries in order. When they received a letter signed "de Beaumarchais" they could be sure that the offer was sound. Apart from discussing current business affairs with him they began to approach Beaumarchais about other transactions. His acceptance or refusal of their suggestions reflected unusual astuteness, and they hailed him as a new financial genius.

When, on one day, Beaumarchais could play many rôles in many places, this meant more to him than merely making money. His greatest wish was fulfilled; he could be versatile. In the morning, in his own carriage, he drove to Duverney's palace, where he was given good advice and commissions. Then he drove in a quick trot to Versailles and paid his respects to the Princesses. Seeing him,

no one would have guessed that an hour before he had been Duverney's docile pupil, being initiated into the business affairs of the day. He whistled, he played the harp and the flute, he repeated gossip, recommended a book, taught Princess Adelaide how to make watches; told greedy Princess Victoire about a new method of preparing poultry; showed religious Princess Louise a delicate attention and gave her a Holy Picture; assured frightened Sophie that his sisters, too, were afraid of thunder-storms. He had a kind thought for each of them, he encouraged them; from his own strong nature he gave each of these weak women a dose of the joy of life. Then he drove back to Paris, concentrating on the interviews before him, and thinking of the commodities he would buy or sell.

Reality stood behind the sober figures, behind the cargoes, and the shipments of goods. Beaumarchais felt this reality dimly without actually knowing it. In his mind, he already visualised the colonies. He was years ahead of his compatriots. Intuitively this man, who realised that money was the essential factor in the independence of the United States of America, appreciated that colonies were necessary. The products from the colonies, which he sold, but which he had never seen, stimulated his imagination.

Duverney taught him not only about trade; he also told him the connections between trade and politics. The young man of business saw France's defeats in the Seven Years' War from a new angle. England's and Prussia's victory was not confined to the battlefields. By the Peace Treaty, France had been forced to surrender the greater part of her overseas dominions to England. These losses were not taken seriously in Versailles. The colonies were too far away to seem real. Louis XV and his courtiers did not realise that their luxurious living standards could be maintained only by exploiting distant domains and defenceless slaves. They had no conception of this fact. The Duc de Choiseul, the Prime Minister, thought that "a cubic metre of Dutch soil was more

valuable than a whole colony," and the Marquis d'Argenson, who was a very clever man, declared that he would "sacrifice all the colonies to the head of a pin."

A man like Beaumarchais, who is closely associated with economic life, has a different point of view. The forests are more than green shadows in the sun; the sea more than a recurrent tide which flows, archlike, into infinity; houses are not mere buildings where human beings can find a home. He saw beyond that: everything represented goods, everything represented money. Beaumarchais learned the value of various kinds of lumber, hewn and in the trunk; he studied the value of land and of the houses which were built on it; he studied the difference between the costs of shipment on land and by sea; the prices of wine; the various kinds of flour; of textiles and of metals. He knew what forests could be financially exploited; which merchants would buy this or that commodity. He understood prices, and knew that their fluctuations were determined by the law of supply and demand. One must buy in time, sell in time. The possibilities involved in speculations, the necessity of acting at the right moment, took possession of him more completely than had his ambitious desire to attain a high office.

He was a successful merchant. The sum of eight or ten thousand *louisdors*, which had seemed out of reach, and which he would need to legalise his aristocratic name, was suddenly available. His childhood wish, to have his own home, his own family, far away from the humble surroundings of his youth, was a wish-dream no longer. It could become reality. His large income was not appreciably affected by his extravagant taste in clothes: he could spend as much as he liked on his conspicuous and foppish dress. He could keep open house without going into debt. To make a fortune he had only to think and combine the facts he knew, and he enjoyed doing this more than anything else. He was always in a state of stimulating hurry. And this constant activity suited his temperament.

His own satisfaction prompted Beaumarchais to tell the Princesses of his good fortune. *Mesdames* wanted their friend to invest some of his surplus wealth, either in credit or in money, in acquiring a high office at Court. The Princesses' wish, which was his own, caused him to ignore Duverney's advice: he decided not to remain in the background, not to remain inconspicuous, quietly making money and gaining influence. The vanity of his youth made him long to prove that he could distinguish himself at Court as well as in business.

An important office was for sale: that of a "Grand Master of the Rivers and Forests." Beaumarchais told the Princesses about this, and they summoned Duverney. Five hundred thousand *livres* would make a great gentleman out of their friend. The Royal Princesses desired this? Duverney placed the sum at their disposal.

Before he could take office a transition stage was necessary: the charter of an aristocratic rank had to be granted. Beaumarchais immediately became a "Secretary to the King." But to be allowed to hold this office, to belong unconditionally to the aristocracy, his father had to give up his honest trade. The father of an aristocrat was not allowed to be a craftsman, he could not be a watchmaker.

Individuals with new patents of the nobility were often so snobbish that they considered all honest work as dishonourable, as beneath their station in life. Anyone who was granted a patent of nobility received at the same time a charter for idleness. For was it a real activity to appear several times a year, in pretentious garbs of office, and to be present, with the entire Court, for special occasions? The offices at Court were an investment; interest was paid in the form of salaries—the Revolution proved that every investment not based on labour is soon exhausted.

A letter to his father shows how little Beaumarchais, at thirty, thought of his elevation to the nobility. He dared not confront the old man in person. How should he explain to him that the father was an obstacle to the son, that his lowly origin and the craft to

which the old man had belonged for almost forty years, a craft which the son, too, had performed with distinction, was held in such contempt by the son's new world that Father Caron must give up this trade if he did not want to harm his son?—"As I cannot change this prejudice," he wrote, "I must submit to it." His elevation to the aristocracy would strongly influence his destiny, "because of the stupid manner in which these things are judged in this country."

A man does not write this sort of letter, he does not choose words of that kind, if he is merely trying to convince someone else. He himself is convinced. Beaumarchais had seen through the system of society in his country, he had recognised its shortcomings, the scandalous attitude of the aristocracy. But he was ambitious, his scheme of life was laid down, he must go on.

His petition, recommended by the Princesses, and already signed by the King—the document, a charter for his nobility, was enclosed—was handed to the Comte de St. Florentin. Beaumarchais was sure that this petition would be granted. He already saw himself as a "Grand Master of the Rivers and the Forests." Petitions went to the Minister of the Royal Household only as a matter of form. But while it was still on the Count's desk, an aristocrat for the first time showed open contempt for the Princesses' favourite.

Beaumarchais' unerring instinct told him that there would be a scene, and that the outcome would depend entirely on his own bearing. The courtier held out a watch to him. Was the man insinuating that his time at the Court was over? Subconsciously Beaumarchais was always tormented by the thought that he was not welcome at Versailles, that the aristocrats who honoured him were really envious of the honour they themselves were showing him. He gazed at the dial and heard the man say: "You understand this craft."

Beaumarchais wanted to pass over this allusion to his middle-class past, an allusion which was meant to be an insult, with a

friendly remark: "I have become very awkward since I gave up this craft." The courtier handed him the watch and said casually: "Do repair it for me." "All right," Beaumarchais said; "but I have warned you that I am more awkward than I used to be." He dropped the watch to the ground so violently that it broke. "You see how right I was to warn you about my awkwardness." He left with a courtly bow.

The laugh was on his side, but the incident was symptomatic. The envy of others was well founded; people were justified when they said that: he charmed all women by his talents, his good taste, his sumptuous clothing, his wit, his handsome appearance, and that "he experienced incredible affairs with great ladies as well as with the little ladies of the theatre." Men who were failures themselves liked to discuss Beaumarchais. His association with Duverney had become known. The old financier's enemies were now his enemies. He did not know from what direction the wind was blowing, but he felt in advance that a storm was approaching. He had not been satisfied with wealth; he had not listened to Duverney's advice that it would be better for him to remain in the background.

When Beaumarchais called on the Comte de St. Florentin to urge him to hasten the decision about his charter, the Minister's expression did not betray the fact that he recognised in this candidate for a high office the poor watchmaker's son who, barely ten years before, had applied for his support in a trade dispute. His manner seemed to indicate that in his own mind he did not connect these two persons whose rank was so different. Did young Caron, however, believe that he could do without the Count's support? Bending over the document, St. Florentin said: "*Mesdames* and the *Dauphin* have interceded on your behalf. The King has raised no objections, you have paid for this high office. Well, nevertheless you will not hold it."

The Comte de St. Florentin did not know that, twenty years later, Beaumarchais would return this sentence, though slightly altered, to another minister, thus hastening the outbreak of the Revolution. Had the King's will ceased to have any real influence ? It took Beaumarchais twenty years to realise this fact. And more than this one humiliation, inflicted on him by St. Florentin and a clique at the Court, was necessary before he was strong enough to express this fact in words.

In vain did Beaumarchais ask the Princesses to help him, in vain did Duverney exert his influence ; the social caste, conspiring against this intruder, remained firm. The courtiers' solidarity against him was powerful, and the other Grand Masters of the Rivers and Forests declared that "they would not tolerate a plebeian like Monsieur Caron in their midst. They would prefer to resign one after the other."

When, after this incident, Beaumarchais confronted his father for the first time, he was inclined to apologise for the letter asking the old man to give up his trade. The consequences of the rebuff he had experienced were worse than he had expected. In order that his father could cease being a watchmaker, Beaumarchais had taken the responsibility of supporting his entire family. He had exhausted his credit, and he held no office at Court. He had no regular income. More than that, his credit had been shaken. He did not know what to do. The Princesses had failed him, the King's will was an empty signature, which was observed only as long as his courtiers were complaisant, and meant nothing as soon as a veto was raised in obscure circles. Not even money was of any assistance. The half-million, which Duverney had placed at his disposal, had no influence.

Beaumarchais sat at his desk in his magnificent house in the rue de Condé and asked for pen and paper. He had no intention of adding to his many diversions by writing. Paper and pen were his weapons, his arms in the battle, now that all else had failed.

It had taken him several days to collect material for a pamphlet. Because of his lowly origin he had been considered unworthy of becoming a "Grand Master of the Rivers and Forests." His father's craft, which Voltaire had called the *art physicien*, was looked down upon by the active Grand Masters. And who were they? Monsieur d'Arbonnes was the son of a bourgeois wig-maker; Monsieur de Maricy's father had been a woolcomber; Monsieur de Vaucel had begun his career as an apprentice to a button-maker. By disclosing their origin, Beaumarchais wanted to prove that they had been merely tools. Beaumarchais' pamphlet was apparently written only to ridicule these upstarts, but at the same time it was a warning to the influential men behind them. For the present he had no other weapon—but he had proven the force of his satire, and they began to be afraid of him.

Beaumarchais was inclined to devote himself entirely to business and ignore the Court, but this would have meant that he submitted to the boycott imposed upon him by the courtiers, and that he laid down his arms. Against his own wishes, deeply hurt and fully aware that his career at Court was over, he applied for the office of "Lieutenant-General of the Royal Hunts." The Duc de Lavallière, who had introduced him to the Princesses, helped him to obtain this office.

He experienced a curious sensation when he signed his full name. He was no longer an adventurer, who boasts with borrowed titles. But the titles which were finally his own did not make him happy, he was not impressed with them when he signed himself "Lieutenant-General of the Royal Hunts," and "Secretary to the King." The courtier Pierre Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais was becoming a bourgeois once more, one of the thousands who, in their hearts, longed for the Revolution, one of the few who took the first steps towards this upheaval.

CHAPTER II

MONSIEUR DE BEAUMARCHAIS, Lieutenant-General of the Royal Hunt, sat in an arm-chair covered with damask made up in a pattern of Bourbon lilies. He was performing his duties as a judge in a magnificent assembly room in the Louvre. It was his task to judge every offence against the royal pleasure of hunting, to sit in judgment on poachers, forest trespassers, and any-one offending against the forest-laws or regulations connected with them. The Lieutenant-General passed judgment as he saw fit.

It was always the same: a knowledge of the law was not necessary to become a judge; the purchaser of an office needed only enough money. But when Beaumarchais took office he became aware of his own intense interest in the law. He did not confine his studies to the forest laws. The disputes between the maker of laws and his subjects gave Beaumarchais a new point of view. True, he did not devote his entire time to a study of the law, but he quickly acquired sufficient knowledge to judge cases independently. Later he did not need a lawyer in the Court.

His immediate subordinates were two Counts of very good family. When he entered the Court, these two "Lieutenants of the Royal Hunt" stood at attention and reported to him before he put on the honourable robes of his office. His own exalted position impressed him. But he was, above all, fascinated by every new human situation; and that was why he came promptly to the sessions assigned to him, why he listened to detailed explanations of the cases before him.

He had known only the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy. As a judge he came into contact with the people for the first time. How miserable these unhappy creatures must be if they hoped to improve their situation by stealing a few dry twigs, by secretly hunting rabbits. They told him that the heavy burden of taxation

had made it impossible for them to cultivate their own land. How could they exist ? Before they themselves could eat any of the foodstuffs they grew, they had to give a tenth to the lord of their manor, a tenth to the clergy, and most of the rest to the royal *taille*. Why should they work in the fields if this labour did not supply their own most primitive needs; if their efforts merely increased the luxury of their feudal lord, the royal tax collector, and the masters of the Church ? These unfortunate creatures had come to believe that they were being persecuted by the State, the clergy, and the aristocracy. They did not seem to care whether they worked or whether they lived by theft. They no longer felt like human beings. They were frightened and cowed when they stepped before the judge, who sentenced them to fines which they could not pay.

Again and again Beaumarchais asked why men like himself had developed so differently ? He was moved by the philosophy that all men are brothers ; he began to understand the pamphlets of his age which expressed in words what he was now feeling. These pamphlets were published despite the rigid censorship and the severe police supervision. He had read *L'Esprit des lois* by Montesquieu, *Le Contrat social* by Rousseau, Voltaire's anonymous and signed polemics, and Helvetius' *L'Homme*. The men of the people, who were tried at the bar, and the millions of others in the country district who shared their fate, were illiterate. The Revolution, germinated amongst the bourgeoisie through the written word, was a spontaneous development amongst the people. For them the Revolution was a reflex action, just as pursued creatures of nature take the initiative, fearing that they themselves may be attacked first.

Duverney, his teacher, had explained to him the reasons for the Revolution. When the tax collectors came to fetch the last *livres*, the last possessions from the houses which they had systematically plundered for years, the peasants joined forces in the feeling that now, after their property had been exploited, they themselves

would be attacked. The revolts reported to Paris were really the defensive actions of a few individuals, who, in self-protection, had united into groups.

Beaumarchais' glimpse into the abyss was superficial. But it convinced him that Duverney's prophecies had not been merely the fear of a wealthy man, who is afraid that his own position of privilege might be in danger. A man who understands a country's economic conditions can foretell the future. But as Beaumarchais, like Duverney, could not bring about decisive changes, he followed the financier's example: he confined himself to observation, and to protecting himself against poverty; he concentrated his personal efforts on making money.

His house in the rue de Condé was furnished with all the comforts of an aristocratic palace. He had outbuildings, servants' quarters, reception rooms, and a dining-room. He had a *valet de chambre*, a *chef* in his kitchens, a stable boy, and a coachman. The horses in his stables were his own; he had a carriage. Men from many different social spheres attended his levée in the morning: guests, merchants, caterers, and aristocrats, who expected some favour from this climber.

As a bourgeois, Beaumarchais had been attracted by the upper strata of society; as an aristocrat, bourgeois life again appealed to him. He did not give up any of his acquired habits or tastes; he continued to make his gentlemanly gestures, and to visit the Palace in Versailles; he continued to see the Princesses, and he spent gay evenings among friends. He had serious conversations with Duverney, and he was active as a merchant. His mode of life was unchanged. But he was increasingly fond of his family, of "happy mediocrity," the *aurea mediocritas*.

Everything in his life, outside the intimate family circle, was a necessary evil. In order to make money, to maintain his position

and his rank, he had to play the rôles he has chosen for himself. But his repertoire did not satisfy him. As an actor, it was as though he were performing to please his father and his two sisters, to whom he was deeply attached. He felt empty, and their admiration showed him the distance he had gone since his youth, their approval made him appreciate his own success.

His sister Julie, whose ability to adjust herself to new surroundings was almost equal to his own, had become accustomed to her wealth. She called herself "Mademoiselle de Beaumarchais," and soon knew how to manage his household. When her brother was out, her intelligent conversation compensated visitors for his absence. She heard the Paris gossip, and her comments were an imitation of Pierre Augustin's gay irony. She concealed her caustic temperament behind a gracious, well-bred manner.

Even Father Caron became used to his son's aristocratic household. Since his wife's death the elderly man's principles had relaxed. He no longer resented the fact that his son had given up his craft. Could he have become wealthy as a watchmaker? The old man was still religious. But did religion forbid a man, who had worked hard throughout his life, to enjoy a comfortable old age, which had come as such a surprise? The former puritan mellowed in this carefree atmosphere, and he was happiest when his son took him to the theatre and introduced him to the actors.

The change in the character of the old watchmaker, whose fatherly pride encouraged his son to write verse, caused Beaumarchais to decide on a plan he had been considering for a long time. He wanted to write a play, to fill his empty heart with fictitious characters. He was at work on a tragedy. His efforts were unsystematic. He wrote a few dialogues, a few isolated scenes. The tragedy had no real plot, no real plan. He was amusing himself with it when he suddenly turned to another interest.

He had met a young Creole woman who had come to France with an aunt. She hoped to arrange for the financing of her inheritance, a huge estate growing colonial produce in San Domingo. Beaumarchais was fascinated, particularly by Pauline's exotic character. Mademoiselle de Breton's skin was dark, she was quite unlike the Parisian women he had known. His financial affairs were stabilised, and he suddenly felt the need for stability in his private life. Besides, this foreign country, this huge property in San Domingo tempted him. The estate was worth two millions, and it had tremendous possibilities for future development. One day it might be worth ten or twenty times as much as it was now.

Beaumarchais' ideas about money had become less modest; he devoted himself daily to business transactions, plans, and combinations. What were twenty or thirty thousand *livres* a year? These sums flowed like water through his hands, for his extravagant mode of life had taught him how to spend money as well as how to earn it. He could not save. An estate worth two millions, firm ground under his feet, and his fantasy of increasing the value of this property—that was wealth, that was power, an influence perhaps greater than Duverney's, who was actually richer, but who was careless and did not know from one hour to the next what he was really worth.

Pauline accepted him at once. He was head over heels in love with her, but he wanted exact information about her income, about her estates, before he committed himself. He had begun his career with the help of one woman, he hoped to acquire wealth through another. He was suspicious of her when she tried to hasten their marriage. He thought that she would be the right wife for him, but only if she were really rich—if a charming personality and wealth were united in her person.

His sisters' friendly feelings for Pauline strengthened his affection for her. When one of Mademoiselle de Breton's countrymen, a gentleman who, by the way, confirmed the reports of her wealth,

asked for Julie's hand in marriage, Beaumarchais decided definitely to marry Pauline. The happiness of his entire family seemed secure. When his sister was married, Beaumarchais would find some influential post for his brother-in-law; his friend Miron, who had married his other sister, Jeanne, had a respected post as secretary in the household of the Prince de Conti.

He already saw himself in the rue de Condé as a fortunate husband with a wife and children. A bourgeois idyll. Only his father's future had not been arranged. Beaumarchais had noticed that the old gentleman was attracted by an "honourable widow"; Julie and he were amused by this attachment. They decided that their father should marry again.

These happy plans would be consummated when he had been assured that Pauline's estates really existed. Beaumarchais wanted to be quite sure. He did not go to San Domingo himself, but he persuaded a relative to go. After his return Beaumarchais was to be married.

One day Beaumarchais observed that the Princesses were less gracious towards him than usual. The next morning the first lady of the bedchamber told him that they could not receive him. Was he in disgrace? Was one of them, were all four of them, jealous because they had heard that he was to be married? He would have ignored the Princesses, but he had wanted to leave at least a back door open to his ambitions as a courtier. Without their protection his career in Versailles would be ended. Despite his contempt for the Court, the day might come when he would desire a higher rank. Besides, the Princesses' friendship for him, which was known in Paris, had increased his prestige as a financier.

He asked Duverney, whom he always consulted, what he should do. But the old financier was no longer troubled by his own unpopularity at Court. France's precarious political situation was

attributed to Madame de Pompadour and to him. He was not unhappy. For his business was flourishing, and through his trusted friends and agents—and Beaumarchais was not the only one—his influence continued. He was losing interest in capricious Versailles. What did the favour or disfavour of the King or his family matter as compared with the millions he was earning?

Beaumarchais had to find out by himself why the Princesses' attitude towards him had changed. He confided in one of the women of the Princesses' entourage, who told him that they did not want to have anything more to do with him, because they had heard that there was friction between him and his father.

The four religious and elderly maiden ladies had consistently denied the many unkind rumours about Beaumarchais. They knew that he attended Mass on Sundays and on every feast-day of the Church. (He had made such a point of his attendance that they could not avoid knowing about it.) They had read the pamphlet he had given the Comte de St. Florentin, and they had been amused by the snobbishness of the wig-maker's and the wool-comber's sons. They had thanked the Duc de Lavallière for helping their friend. All the disparaging remarks they had heard about Beaumarchais had heretofore not affected their loyalty towards him.

When they were told that he was a bad son, they used this accusation to cover up the fact that they themselves were hurt. They had learned that he was in love with Pauline, and grieved by this news, they decided to give him up.

The Princesses made this decision without taking Beaumarchais' growing talents as a stage-manager into consideration. During the next few days, composed and cheerful as he always was at Court, Beaumarchais was seen in the galleries and courtyards, in the parks and the reception-rooms at Versailles. With him was a distinguished-looking old gentleman. Walking arm in arm with this grey-haired man, Beaumarchais bowed to the courtiers whose offices were higher in rank than his own, he acknowledged the bows

of those beneath him, but he spoke to no one. He wanted to make the Princesses curious. They had more time at their disposal now that they did not receive him, and they were bored. He wanted to force them to ask about his companion. And they did ask, but no one could answer their question. Their curiosity finally prompted them to send for him. Princess Adelaide spoke for the four-leaf clover. Her manner was inquisitorial when she asked about the old man with whom he had been seen.

Beaumarchais answered simply and naturally: "My father."

The four women looked at each other, surprised and guilty. A bad son who went for a walk with his father every day? Perhaps it was equally untrue that he was contemplating marriage? They were inclined to forgive him, but jealousy makes people suspicious. They wanted to meet the old gentleman. Perhaps Beaumarchais was lying when he said that this old man was his father? Did Beaumarchais seem embarrassed? They believed that he had proven his own guilt. Undoubtedly the old man was not his father. To force him to show his hand, they expressed the wish to speak to the old gentleman at once.

Monsieur André-Charles Caron, who no longer troubled to question his son, and who trusted him blindly, was very much surprised to find himself in the presence of the King's daughters. What a mad prank his incalculable son had played on him again; obviously this was to be a pleasant surprise. And when the Princesses asked him whether their friend Beaumarchais was a good son, the old man was deeply moved. He began to sob more naturally than he could possibly have done had he been instructed to do so, and beside himself with emotion, he declared that no man on earth had a better son. He was so obviously sincere, his tears were so spontaneous, and his manner so dignified that the Princesses promised each other never to mistrust Beaumarchais again.

Soon their belief in his strong family feeling was strengthened.

He was not only a good son, but a loving brother as well. One day, when, as usual, he came to see them, he was excited, and he forgot to pose as a courtier. They asked him what had happened. He said that he had received a letter from his sisters in Spain.

The Princesses read the letter, and each of them was resolved to do what she could for him. He was to leave for Spain as soon as possible. One of their chamberlains was sent to the Prime Minister. The Duc de Choiseul, who was particularly haughty, was forced to write a flattering letter of introduction to the Spanish Prime Minister. Paris Duverney, summoned hastily to Versailles, was instructed by the Princesses to give their friend two hundred thousand *livres*. This man, who had shown how kind he was, must have every help in his efforts to save his family from disgrace.

The preparations for his journey were made so eagerly and so rapidly that Beaumarchais could have left as early as January, 1764. In his first excitement he had told the Princesses that not a minute should be lost. But in April he was still in Paris. A love-affair of his sister Lisette : He had not seen her for sixteen years. No love-affair seemed tragic enough to make him neglect the many plans he was making in connection with his journey to Spain. A man refused to marry Lisette though he had been engaged to her : Her honour was at stake : Beaumarchais no longer thought it important whether he persuaded this Don Clavigo to marry her, or to promise to marry her, at once or in a few months' time. With a letter of introduction from the Prime Minister, with two hundred thousand *livres* in his pocket, he was sure that he could accomplish anything. Life had been stagnant during the last few years. Now things began to move. The perspectives before him were so promising that he wanted time to prepare for this journey.

An eagerness, greater than any he had known before, filled him when he began to study the economic position of Spain. He saw Duverney more frequently than usual. The younger man decided to organise a financial monopoly in Spain--similar to that controlled



THE MARCHIONESS OF POMPADOUR
Engraving by Aug St Aubin after a drawing by C Cochin

by Duverney in France—where a great-grandson of Louis XIV was on the throne. Duverney, who approved of this plan, promised to help him. Beaumarchais would enjoy an advantage which Duverney lacked when he began: a huge credit was at Beaumarchais' disposal for his adventure. Besides, he benefited by the experiences of this clever old man; he need only apply what Duverney had taught him to the conditions in Spain.

Above all, Beaumarchais studied the colonies. He was interested in Louisiana, west of the Mississippi River, which the Madrid Court had been given as a compensation for the alliance with France. French exporters had formerly sold goods to Louisiana, now their trade relations with this colony had been broken off. Beaumarchais wanted to recapture this territory for them. He planned to found a company, which would export colonial produce from Louisiana, and, more important and lucrative still, it would organise the sale of slaves to Louisiana.

Duverney had told him about the slave trade. The financier regretted that France had forfeited this profitable trade when the colonies were lost to England and Spain. A cool report of a contemporary merchant reflects what these losses meant to France: "For England and France, the African trade is most important. This trade furnishes negroes for the development of the colonies, producing sugar, indigo, cacao, and cotton. The products can be cultivated only by negro labour."

The slave trade contradicted all the principles of the rights of men. Later, Beaumarchais' passionate contempt for this trade was as great as his earlier desire to promote it. But in this phase of his life he was possessed by the idea of founding a great financial enterprise, and no moral considerations could have dissuaded him from this plan.

Beaumarchais' journey was delayed not only by his preparations for his financial venture. The Marquise de Pompadour had been taken seriously ill. Her death, which was imminent, might upset

the balance of power in Versailles, and before Beaumarchais left for Spain he wanted to know what would happen at the Court. Would her favourite, the Duc de Choiseul, remain Prime Minister? Might not the Jesuit question arise again? New individuals, new influences?

The Pompadour's tragic destiny did not move any of the ambitious friends, whom she had helped. The fact that she had aged before her years, that she had ceased to be the King's mistress, was accepted as a matter of course, because without this renunciation she could not have remained powerful. The King, too, was not affected by her death. For him she was a passing memory and a political adviser, whose advice had frequently been disastrous. Louis XV regretted the proscription of the Jesuits, despite the fact that their uncompromising severity had often caused him difficulties. The King, who had banned the *Encyclopédie* to prevent the "enlightenment" of his people, had, as d'Alembert wrote to Voltaire, "been responsible for a greater justice to philosophy." Not until it was too late did Louis XV realise that "without knowing what he was doing or wanting to do so" he had followed the wishes of the philosophers and the enlightened parliamentary counsellor as well as those of the Pompadour when he banished the Jesuits. People were wrong when they assumed that he did not understand the development of thought in France. He was one of the few men in his country who predicted the coming of the great Revolution. But: "There will be no fundamental changes, at least not as long as I am alive," was his point of view. That is why, after Madame de Pompadour's death, he made no changes in France. When the carriage, driving her body from Versailles, passed the window of his study, he remained unmoved. True, he looked out of the window, but he only remarked to the courtiers around him: "What bad weather we are having to-day."

Not until Beaumarchais was convinced that in the immediate future there would be no fundamental changes in Versailles did he

ask his superior officer, the Duc de Lavallière, the King's Master of the Hunt, for a short leave of absence. He left Paris. His father, who was deeply moved, gave him his blessing, and Pauline embraced him. He had almost forgotten her existence, for his imagination dwelt on fantasies of his future power, the immeasurable wealth he would so soon acquire.

CHAPTER III

DON JOSÉ CLAVIGO Y FAXARDO, a Keeper of the Royal Spanish Archives, was delighted when a Frenchman, whom he had met by chance in a lady's drawing-room, expressed the wish to talk to him at length. The editor of *Pensador*, the style and production of which was modelled on the English *Spectator*, enjoyed having connections with foreign countries—a Frenchman who desired to discuss with him the intellectual problems of his country? A conversation with this foreigner might be quite as useful as reading foreign periodicals. Don José Clavigo had not heard, or not understood, the Frenchman's name. But that did not matter. He invited the foreigner for some morning chocolate. Don José's superior officer was not in Madrid, and during his temporary absence he had placed his magnificent house at Don José's disposal. It gratified his vanity to receive the foreigner, who came with a friend, in a splendid apartment, where they were waited on by liveried servants.

Clavigo did not flatter himself in his paper. He described himself as small and fat, with a red face, as a Sancho Panza, who was always good-natured: "A good-natured moralist," who did not appear to be a thinker, though he edited the *Pensador*.

He received the stranger with a gracious gesture and the Spanish phrase "my home is yours." He offered the hospitality of the house (which did not belong to him), and his own ingenious expression put him in a happy mood. He felt himself to be interesting and charming, and he accepted the complimentary remarks with which the Frenchman began the conversation as his due. Completely at his ease, he sat facing a man whose vivacious face, whose clever eyes convinced Clavigo that this stranger's clearly spontaneous remarks must be sincere. Clavigo, whose writings were well known, was asked to join a society of authors founded by this well dressed

Frenchman. As the Spanish representative he was to carry on a correspondence with great scientists all over the world. A new kind of Encyclopedia? This suggestion was in harmony with the spirit of the age, a suggestion which was worth his attention.

Clavigo, in his usual easy manner, discussed the advantages which all nations would derive from such a correspondence. It was his habit to caress everyone with whom he agreed with his eyes. His voice was ingratiating, "he spoke like an angel, beaming with pleasure and with the feeling that he would become world famous."

Clavigo wanted to repay the stranger for the pleasure he had given him. He volunteered his services, but he did not expect this offer to be taken any more seriously than the offer of his house. Clavigo assumed that this phrase would be properly appreciated, but that his guest would not consider it further. To his surprise, the stranger took him at his word and explained that he wished to confide in him. With a charming gesture, which Clavigo unconsciously imitated, the Frenchman pointed to his companion and declared that this gentleman, whom Clavigo now observed with great curiosity, would not disturb their privacy, as he was informed about the matter he wished to discuss.

Other countries, other customs. Clavigo had exploited a knowledge about England which he had acquired by reading about that country; perhaps these Frenchmen would make it possible for him to write an essay about French customs and manners. He listened more attentively when the Frenchman mentioned two French girls who had emigrated to Madrid, for, he could not deny to himself—though he disliked thinking about it—that he had been a frequent visitor at the home of two Frenchwomen, and one of them had been . . .

Clavigo's good-natured face lengthened. The stranger might have been referring to the very case he had in mind; suddenly his limbs were heavy, and he could neither raise his hand to stop the Frenchman, nor could he open his mouth to contradict him.

A young man born in the Canary Islands ("Like me," it flashed through Clavigo's mind. "Does he, or does he not mean me?") had become engaged to one of these Frenchwomen, and the elder of the two sisters had helped and encouraged him. The disconcerting guest went so far as to say that the young man had received money from her.

Did the stranger notice that Clavigo had paled? Apparently not. What was he saying? Clavigo sighed deeply, his face flushed and then grew pale again, for he saw to his horror, though he could not interrupt, that the Frenchman had indeed noticed his confusion, but that this did not deter him from continuing in the same quiet voice.

Clavigo's conscience had already troubled him quite enough, and the stranger's lively account of the affair conjured up his flight from the altar, the revival of his love, and his recent attempts to win his bride afresh. The Frenchman was remarking that, for the second time, the young Spaniard's superior officer had given his consent to the marriage.

A short pause. The stranger's magic gaze numbed Clavigo. He was bathed in perspiration. He was not quite sure whether the Frenchman knew that he himself was the despicable creature whose story was being told. He ventured to glance at him and at his companion. Their faces remained impassive. Clavigo, his head bent, was forced to listen. He thought: Yes, it is true. For the second time he had told the girl that he would not marry her; he had responded to her threats by threatening in return: he would ruin her in this foreign country if she did not leave him alone. She and her sister were helpless. Helpless? Clavigo looked up. He dared not look the speaker in the eye; he saw only an ironical mouth which opened and closed, and white teeth, which would have done honour to a wolf. The words he heard seemed to slap his ears: the brother, deeply moved by his sisters' desperate letters, had come to Madrid from Paris at once, and this brother—Clavigo's heart stood still, for

the stranger was saying: "I am that brother." He had left everything—his country, his duties, his family, his pleasures—to revenge his unhappy and innocent sister in Spain. Justice was on his side, and he was strong enough to unmask the traitor—Clavigo stopped breathing when the other said: "And you are this traitor."

Ten years later this scene, described by Beaumarchais with consummate art, made such a profound impression on Johann Wolfgang (at the time not yet "von") Goethe that he wrote his *Clavigo*. But Beaumarchais was not concerned with the dramatic effect of this scene; he wanted Clavigo to declare that his sister was innocent, that he had broken his word to marry her through no fault of hers. This reparation of her honour must finally force Clavigo to keep his promise.

Beaumarchais was convinced that he was a more able man than the Royal Recorder. What, after all, could be Clavigo's reason for not marrying a woman whom he obviously loved? A lack of money and a lack of influence. With Beaumarchais' help he should have enough of both.

His sisters' living standard did not reflect his own high rank. "Here there is a small and a great French world. My sisters are too well educated to belong to the small world; but not rich enough to belong to the great. He would make them rich enough. Clavigo could not possibly find a better protector than the brother of the bride he had scorned. He would therefore scorn her no longer.

Back to his own plans. He had not brought with him two hundred thousand *livres* merely to establish a *petit-bourgeois* household. The money was to "oil the wheels"; it was to be a small advance to the ministers and officials who would receive his petitions.

This journey, his very first, had stimulated his vitality. The disappointments of Versailles had ceased to exist. He felt strong

and free, as he had been in his earliest youth. The “great world” which had repulsed him seemed petty, unworthy of being called “great.” What was Versailles to a man travelling quickly through the world, who saw farmlands and vineyards, the sea at Bayonne, and the harbours, where goods were unloaded and loaded incessantly—goods which came from foreign countries and others which were being shipped abroad? He was going to the country where the sun never set. He wanted to capture a few rays of this sun for himself.

He was not frightened by this foreign country. French was spoken in the north of Spain, though the dialect was an antiquated one. This district seemed like a French province. He was not conscious of a foreign atmosphere until he crossed the Catalonian Border to the south, but this strangeness made him feel superior. These stiff, awkward, and wordy Castilians concealed only piousness or vice behind their fine phrases; but their real characteristics were so carefully hidden that these natives appeared like rigid human dolls. From the very beginning he was conscious of his superiority to these slow and ponderous people, and he was surprised, at the first *fiestas* he attended, to find that the women restrained their passionate natures as little as did the men.

Only the bourgeoisie frequented his sisters’ home, and they knew nothing about the Court in Madrid. Guibert, this honest mason, who called himself an architect in Spain, had not been successful enough even to know the aristocracy at a distance. But there must be some woman in Madrid who, under Beaumarchais’ tutelage, would please this Catholic, this “most Christian King.” Beaumarchais never doubted his ultimate success; he must penetrate farther into the hierarchy of the State in which he wanted to realise his plans. The Prime Minister, Grimaldi? Beaumarchais was less interested in his statesmanship than he was in the answer to these questions: Was he considered corruptible or not? How high were his demands? Beaumarchais already pictured the transfer of the

two hundred thousand *livres* from his pocket to Grimaldi's. In return he would be granted a concession as important as the one Paris Duverney had secured when he was at the height of his power. Beaumarchais would be granted the right to supply the Spanish Army with munitions, horses, and fodder. Such a concession would be so valuable that new capital would easily be found, and Beaumarchais could then buy another concession to export slaves to Louisiana. Money brings with it more money and business. Trade with the colonies, the settlement of the Sierra Morena, which was as barren as the Sierra Nevada through which he had travelled! This primitive country harboured tremendous possibilities, tremendous treasures, but the wealth in it was like stagnant water; movement was necessary in order to make the territory productive. Beaumarchais did not realise that he was on the verge of fantasy.

Beaumarchais became fond of Clavigo when he knew him better. After their first excited meeting, the Keeper of the Archives came to see him more and more frequently, because he hoped to be reconciled with his bride. Beaumarchais liked this man whose insignificant appearance concealed great learning, whose conversation was clever—when he was given a chance to talk. Clavigo's ambition alone had apparently prevented him from marrying this girl without influence and money. Moreover, the French Ambassador had advised Beaumarchais to arrange his sister's marriage if the faithless bridegroom really regretted his actions. A more obvious repentance than Clavigo's was inconceivable. Whenever his unfaithfulness was mentioned, he reproached himself harshly, asking humbly to be allowed to call at the sisters' home.

When the news of his arrival drove Lisette to her room, and she did not leave it, he showed psychological insight, and declared that her angry flight had made him hopeful. Soon Clavigo wrote a letter asking for her hand in marriage. She consented. Clavigo was

hastily summoned, and the new engagement was solemnly agreed upon.

From that day onwards Beaumarchais and his sisters experienced a series of surprises, which the most imaginative mind could not have invented. Once Clavigo left his home and disappeared. The bride's brother moved heaven and earth to find the vanished bridegroom. When he found him he was appeased by Clavigo's plausible excuse: that he had been forced to leave his superior officer's house, because he again opposed the marriage.

In a few days the marriage contract was drafted. Everything seemed settled at last. But Clavigo had disappeared once more. This time he had to move, so he declared, because he had been living with a friend who was a state official, and the King had placed a house at his disposal on condition that he lived there alone. Clavigo added that it did not really matter where he lived.

Beaumarchais listened, and then showed him the marriage contract. Impossible, Clavigo responded; he could not sign it until the following morning. Why not? Because he had taken a purgative. If Clavigo had signed it in this condition, the customs of the country would have made it null and void. Beaumarchais found out that this was true, but he was impatient, and he asked the apostolic notary's help in getting Clavigo's signature. He was surprised when the notary informed him that another promise of marriage made by Clavigo had been presented to him. Nine years before, Lisette's fiancé had promised to marry the chambermaid of the superior officer who now opposed his marriage to Lisette. Until the first promise had been fulfilled, or until this chambermaid, who may have become Clavigo's wife in the meantime, had passed away, Clavigo could not marry Lisette.

Beaumarchais confronted him, and threatened to go to Aranjuez to see the Prime Minister, to whom he had a letter of introduction. He would ask him to force Clavigo to marry the chambermaid. Clavigo answered: "My dear brother, I am completely innocent . . .

assure your sister that I shall love her as long as I live, and come to see me this evening at eight o'clock."

Beaumarchais had to be content. "Even then I did not believe the malicious rumours I had heard about him. Was it possible that this scoundrel had again got the better of me? To what end? I could not guess, nor could I see any reason for his actions." At eight o'clock that evening, in the company of two gentlemen, he went to Clavigo's new home. When he left the carriage, the woman of the house came towards him and said: "Monsieur Clavigo moved from here an hour ago; I do not know his new address." Troubled by this news, and beside himself because he had been fooled once more, Beaumarchais returned to his room. A few moments later a courier from Aranjuez brought him a letter.

The French Ambassador informed him that Clavigo had reported to the Police Commander in Aranjuez, accusing Beaumarchais of holding a pistol at his throat in an effort to force him to sign a marriage contract. The Ambassador did not believe this tale, but the consequences for Beaumarchais might be disastrous.

Beaumarchais was reading this letter in consternation when an officer of the guards whom he knew came into his room. "Monsieur Beaumarchais, you have not a moment to lose. You must escape, or you will be arrested in the morning. I must warn you, the order for your arrest has already been given. Your adversary is a devil. Flee at once; in a cell you would have no opportunity to defend yourself. . . ."

"I am to run away? I would rather perish. I locked myself in my room, I was confused, my heart beat fast. I flung myself upon a chair. For two hours my mind was a blank, I was incapable of thought or of action. This unnatural repose made me recover my senses. . . ." "Senses" meant that he sought refuge in paper and ink. Beaumarchais wrote. He recorded his experiences with Clavigo, everything he thought about him, everything about himself, what he knew about his sisters' lives. With pedantic

care he attached the letters he had received from Clavigo, and the copies of those he had written to Clavigo: Clavigo's promise to marry his sister, his confirmation of their engagement, his reparation of her honour. Beaumarchais thus compiled a *dossier* which was to be a faithful account of what had happened.

The next day when Beaumarchais appeared in Aranjuez the French Ambassador offered him a carriage drawn by six mules for his homeward journey to France through Spain. He must flee, and as quickly as possible, the Ambassador assured him, if he wanted to avoid deportation. Clavigo had done his utmost, the power of his benefactors was omnipotent, no one could help Beaumarchais.

Beaumarchais never ran away from dangerous situations. He trusted the force of his personality, believing that he could master any difficulties. He visualised this fat little man who seemed so harmless, and the feeling of his own superiority made him decide to fight Clavigo's invisible allies. He was in Aranjuez, in the Spanish Versailles, in a palace filled with courtiers. Here he would surely find some support; his pockets were filled with money, he was entirely familiar with Court life, he had great vitality. He had a letter of introduction from the Duc de Choiseul. After all, he was not an ordinary foreigner. Was it still necessary for him to remind himself that he was no longer the son of a simple bourgeois, but a man who held a high office of State, whose rank would be confirmed at any time by the French Ambassador?

He asked the way to the offices of Grimaldi, the Prime Minister, and waited modestly among the crowd in the ante-room. If all else failed, his memorandum would prove the justice of his cause.

Time passed. The Prime Minister would probably not be able to receive all the petitioners who were waiting to see him. Then a high official, in particularly elaborate dress, walked through the

ante-room. When Beaumarchais heard his name, General Vhal, he hurried up to him, and asked for the honour of a conversation. A Frenchman? The General, a francophil, agreed. Beaumarchais' one request was to be allowed to read his memorandum to the General.

An hour later he stood before Charles III with his memorandum. He read it with the "eloquence of the moment." The construction of the plot was enchanting; a bourgeois drama was unfolded before His Majesty. The powers of persuasion which emanated from Beaumarchais' personality decided the situation in his favour. Clavigo would lose his post and be banished for ever.

Beaumarchais observed the King closely while, excited by the memorandum, he gave these orders. The bearing of Louis XIV's great-grandson did not resemble his ancestor's. He was dressed like a peasant, like a "poacher." His face was repulsive. His coarse woollen stockings were out of keeping with his simple coat of good cloth and even more so with his black knee-breeches. Beaumarchais could not compare the King of Spain with Louis XV. Would it be possible to find a *maitresse en titre* for this monarch, who was obviously accustomed to a domestic middle-class life?

In Aranjuez, Beaumarchais' audience with Charles III was the popular topic of conversation. The French Ambassador asked him to dine; everyone wanted to meet the Frenchman who had come directly from Paris to Madrid to revenge his sister, who was received in audience by the King "a few hours after his arrival," and who had proved the justice of his case.

This happy turn of events caused Beaumarchais to declare that he would remain in Spain until his sisters were safely married. In the meantime he alluded to "projects which Paris Duverney, the great financier, had asked him to arrange"; he casually mentioned that he had studied Spanish trade and finance, and that he could suggest ways and means by which both would be stimulated.

Monsieur Durant, an elderly man, was courting the deserted bride. But despite the wrongs which Clavigo had inflicted on her, she was apparently fond of him. She asked to be allowed to postpone her final decision. Everyone in Spain, and not only Lisette, preferred slow developments. Beaumarchais alone was determined not to submit to this crawling pace. He was in a hurry. His social success was only beginning, though soon he was asked not only to the home of the French Ambassador. Lord Rochford, the English Ambassador, received him with equal graciousness. This was not a difficult success. When he once had an introduction to a great house, an opportunity of demonstrating his brilliance—this he had known for years—he was always welcome in any society where people appreciated sociability.

The governing classes in Madrid usually spoke French. In honour of the King of Spain, a descendant of Louis XV, this monarch's language had remained the fashion. French gentlemen were welcome, for they relieved the monotony of Court life. "Beaumarchais outdid all those who had come before." Not only did he bring with him the manners of Versailles, he also brought the gaiety from the annual fairs of Paris. He translated Spanish songs, he chatted, he sang, he could play most musical instruments, he intrigued, he repeated anecdotes. He made himself so popular that finally a beautiful woman was attracted by him.

Two months after his arrival in Madrid he wrote to his father that an aristocratic lady wanted to thank Father Caron for the kindness he had shown her thirty-three years before—when he had laid the foundations of her present pleasant relationship. The great lady confirmed this frivolous remark with the words: "That is what I think, that is what I feel, and I swear that it is the truth."

The son of the puritanical Huguenots was not shocked by this frivolous remark: he considered Beaumarchais' journey a sacrifice to the honour of the family. He did not grudge Pierre Augustin this opportunity of making the journey more pleasant. But he and

his daughters had to avoid rousing Pauline's suspicions. Instead of going out for a drive, the beautiful Creole girl sat over the sheets of paper which she filled with tender words to her fiancé. He answered the "dear child's" letters, but this did not decrease his passion for the Marquise de la Croix.

Though he was in love, and occupied with Court society, he never neglected his financial interests. But the slowness and the *grandezza*, with which every official, every Minister received his suggestions, made him incredibly impatient. His imagination drove him on at a tremendous pace. As soon as one of his memoranda had been placed before a Minister, Beaumarchais began another, which was soon banished to forgetfulness in the desk of another Government office. He waited anxiously for every decision. He sought comfort and diversion in the Marquise de la Croix' companionship.

This lady's beauty—she was by birth a Frenchwoman—fascinated Beaumarchais. Baron von Gleichen described her as "the essence of majestic beauty, as the ideal of a Roman Empress." She was the woman whom he had been seeking; the King of Spain had noticed her, and she would be clever enough to rule a country as a *maîtresse en titre*. Beaumarchais needed only an opportunity and an associate who would not shun any means to attain this end.

The plan to imitate her late countrywoman appealed to the Marquise at once, for she was bored by the stiff, dull life at the Spanish Court. She did not take her love for Beaumarchais any more seriously than she took her marital fidelity. This well-dressed Parisian brought with him the atmosphere of her home, the fragrance of easy morals, which she had missed in Madrid. Besides, she was ambitious. At the age of fourteen she had sacrificed her virtue to a Bishop in order to make a career for herself. Her husband was an artillery commander, but poor. She desired wealth, and her meeting with Beaumarchais was providential. She

refused to allow her conscience to trouble her. She was living with a man whom she did not love, and she deceived him with Beaumarchais: she would deceive the King too, whom she would not love, with Beaumarchais, and together they would govern this country and its profitable colonies.

They decided on this plan, but the "how" was not yet clear. Should they ask the French Ambassador or the French Court to help them? Should they undertake this adventure alone? Beaumarchais met the Marquise in the *salons*, they sang duets, they played cards and shared the winnings. They met secretly at appointed places. When their short ecstasy was over, they discussed their plans. They followed Madame de Pompadour's example, and applied her methods to attract the King's attention. On every possible occasion his gaze must be directed towards the Marquise de la Croix. By chance, her coachman must lose his way in the royal hunting grounds, and the King's *valet de chambre* must mention her to His Majesty as often as he tactfully could. Beaumarchais easily won the support of the *valet de chambre*. He thrilled Monsieur Piny by an account of Monsieur de Binet, Louis XV's *valet de chambre*. Binet was an aristocrat; he had become a landowner after he had helped Madame de Pompadour to power.

In a long memorandum Beaumarchais informed the Duc de Choiseul about his plans. In this highly political document Beaumarchais tried to convince the French Prime Minister that with his and the Marquise de la Croix' help, he could rule Spain as though it were a French province. The Duke need only agree to Beaumarchais' suggestions. Everything was ready. Without knowing why, the husband of the beautiful lady concerned, the Marquis de la Croix, had already received the Order of St. James, an annuity from the King, and a diamond cross from the King's brother, the Infante Don Luis. Monsieur Piny had assured him that the Marquise's elevation to a higher rank was imminent. A Bourbon alliance, which Choiseul wanted to bring about, would unite France

and Spain less effectively than would the King's love for the Marquise de la Croix.

When the Duc de Choiseul received this memorandum, he read it several times. He was not a puritan, it was said that he had had several love-affairs. The Pompadour had made him Prime Minister, but in this position he had acquired great dignity. Beaumarchais' obvious lack of restraint frightened him. He did not answer the memorandum, and wrote in the margin for his secretary's information: "It is absolutely essential that hereafter this individual be excluded from our correspondence with Spain."

Beaumarchais was not aware that his subsequent suggestions concerning the Marquise de la Croix were rebuffed even before they were read. This intrigue, which soon existed more in his imagination than in reality, had not decreased his overwhelming desire to be rich. He signed agreements, he negotiated, he made an increasing number of plans.

When he was not occupied with his pleasures or with this intrigue, he sat at his desk, writing letters, new exposés, and memoranda: he wrote about Spanish economic conditions in general, about the sale of negroes, about the settlement of the Sierra Morena—but he made no progress. The desk drawers, which had swallowed up his memoranda, remained closed. Again and again he heard that his ideas had been accepted; then he would believe that one foot was already in the stirrup. But his messages to his father reflect his own lack of assurance. The good humour in these letters did not quite conceal his disappointment. "Success alone determines the opinion of others about speculators. If some unexpected event destroys my barge after it has reached the harbour, I can expect nothing but disdainful smiles from those who would have praised me to the skies if I had been successful."

His depression was short-lived. For he already saw himself as the absolute master of an organisation supplying foodstuffs to the

King of Spain's troops, and to Mallorca and the African colonies. In his imagination he had outstripped Duverney; he wrote that his estimates were correct, better than any made by other army contractors. "One expedient had made his estimates successful: the spirit of understanding."

One million, two million, had ceased to seem large sums. He gaily added a nought to every figure. The readers of his letters, his father and his sisters, were intoxicated by these sums, and Julie, economical careful Julie, could not manage with the money he had left in France for his family. Julie did not reproach herself. Could a sister stop to think before she spent a *louis dor* while her good brother's earnings were calculated in millions? He was not planning to make millions only by supplying the Spanish Army with food. When his family read that the sale of each negro slave to Louisiana would mean a roll of *louis d'ors*, that it was relatively simple to sell five or six thousand of these creatures to Louisiana, and that, too, they could be exported to the Spanish colonies, the millions seemed very close at hand.

Beaumarchais' imagination knew no bounds. True, he had established connections everywhere, but Duverney's advice, the support of reality, was missing.

He lived luxuriously in the "good society for which I was born." He wrote to his father: "Your son is amusing himself like a king. He spends his evenings either with the wife of the Russian Ambassador or with Lord Rochford." He dined twice a week with the Commander of the Corps of Engineers, and drove in the environments of Madrid in a coach drawn by six horses.

Had he overcome his contempt for the Court? Had his own disdainful remarks about "the scandalously empty life, nothing but dull pleasures" been forgotten? Or did his intense love of pleasure, so like a bird ruffling up its feathers, merely hide his deeper interest in finance? He had an idea; it was an old one, revived. He might found a Spanish stock company like the East India Trading Company

John Laas; a Louisiana Company. No doubt he would be able to organise this tremendous enterprise.

Beaumarchais hated missing anything, so he wrote an anonymous work: *The Patriotic considerations of a Spanish citizen about Louisiana*. This pamphlet was to convince anyone doubting the practicability of his proposals that the "Indian Council" administering the Spanish colonies would be well advised to turn over their powers to the *Compagnie de la Louisiana* which was soon to be founded.

Nevertheless, none of his suggestions was taken seriously. His orgy of commercial superficiality brought no results. The bait was not fastened firmly enough to the line, no fish was tempted. A torrent of expert opinion flowed from his rapid pen; he was continuously making offers. In vain; nothing happened.

The Marquise de la Croix, too, began to question her lover's diplomatic and commercial abilities. She did not think that he would return, as he promised when he left her. Almost a year had passed, and she had not become the King's mistress, or the richest woman in Spain. But she did not break off her relations with Beaumarchais. She buried her hopes—and left him his. Nor did she believe that his influence at the Court of Versailles would make her a *maîtresse en titre*. But she remembered him affectionately, and introduced him to her aristocratic relatives in Paris.

When, on the homeward journey, Beaumarchais weighed the profits and the losses of his visit to Spain, he was cheerful despite his failure. What kind of a world was he leaving? The increasing distance to it made him see Spain from a fresh angle. What had he learned? Had he not merely wasted time? He had spent almost a year in Spain. It worried him when he studied the calendar. Could he not have spent these months more profitably in Versailles where a successor to the Pompadour had to be appointed? Instead he had tried to create a new world for himself by making the King's bed

in Aranjuez? Life among the great ladies and gentlemen in Madrid was like that of the aristocrats in Versailles. Had he wasted time? No. True he had failed as a financier, as a diplomat, and as a match-maker. But what if he had? Was he nothing but a financier, a diplomat, a family man? The music he had heard, the styles of dress he had seen, in brief, the Spanish background would always live in his memory. This would be a great asset; it would furnish costumes for a very gay drama. The main character must be as impudent as he was himself and full of feelings, which, to be sure, he did not really possess. Of course, if he wanted to describe himself in Spain, his respected audience would not believe that one man could possibly have played so many parts. He must be two persons: one, the individual whose mask he had worn; the other, the personality he had been forced to conceal, his own self.

This was a failure, however. When a man is thirty-three years old and has plenty of money, when he has so many ideas that he can hardly master them all, Beaumarchais felt that he had again reached the end of a period in his life. He might achieve in Versailles what he had failed to accomplish in Madrid.

His senses were still held by the Marquise de la Croix, her picture was in his heart as well as in his trunk. But in his mind the women passed in review whom he might offer to the King of France. And suddenly he was overcome by an intense longing for his Creole, "the dear child" whom he had remembered so rarely while he was in Spain.

CHAPTER IV

OPTIMISTIC Beaumarchais confronted an entirely changed situation. The Dauphin had died during his absence. True, the succession to the throne was ensured, for he left three sons, who all eventually became Kings of France: the eldest as Louis XVI, the other two after the Revolution and the Napoleonic era as Louis XVIII and Charles X.

The grief caused by the Dauphin's death weighed heavily on Versailles, and the courtiers were unable to dispel this depression. Louis XV had developed a taste for family life. More and more frequently he retired to his small apartments, where he devoted himself to his personal enjoyment.

Mesdames, too, had ceased to receive. While Beaumarchais had been away they had become old-maidish; their capriciousness before he left a year before had been the beginning of this condition. Even the return of their favourite did not relieve the hysterical melancholy which overcame them after their brother's death.

Not only the royal family and the Court, all of Paris, too, had altered. The aristocracy was no longer impudent and high-spirited, the rising bourgeoisie had ceased to be arrogantly wanton. Fashions as well were no longer the same. Extremes in dress had been replaced by simplicity; ladies and gentlemen, who had flirted with each other brazenly before Beaumarchais' departure, now gazed languishingly into each other's eyes. Emotions were in vogue; people had become sentimental. Couples, who had been married for a decade, and who after their wedding had seen each other only casually on special occasions, moved to the same wing of their house, and lived, not as a lady and a gentleman, but as a man and a woman. Aristocratic mothers, who had never seen their children unless they were shown them by their nurses, now considered it their most important duty to care for the spiritual and intellectual

development of their beloved offspring. Friends, who had expressed their feelings in clever epigrams, wrote each other sentimental letters, emotions ruled supreme, and devotion was affected. The opposite extreme had followed the unsentimental period, and sentiments were exaggerated.

Beaumarchais had to adjust himself to this new world. Would it be difficult for this *à la mode* fop to be sentimental, to languish with the others, to find not only pleasure in love, but to seek enjoyment in suffering as well? Beaumarchais did not find this adjustment arduous. He merely discarded the frivolous cloak of the aristocracy, which he had acquired in his youth. The great world was becoming bourgeois. Had the writings of this "somewhat wild" Jean-Jacques Rousseau made such a profound impression on the age, or had the influence of his works coincided with a lessening of the powers of enjoyment, with an urge to replace excessive pleasures with restrained enjoyment? As an exact observer and critic of his age, Beaumarchais ascertained that both influences were responsible for this change. An empty life was no longer satisfying. The Court had lost its brilliance. Perhaps the King himself had no real power to shine, he was not a sun, radiating warmth like his predecessor, Louis XIV. Everyone felt that the life of the King, the life about him, was pure illusion. No wonder that people longed to give their own lives some content. Everyone thought that something must happen. But what? While they waited for an unknown event, the aristocrats became bourgeois. In their social ascent the bourgeois had become aristocrats; they now met in their common admiration of philosophy.

Voltaire's books were devoured; Rousseau was learned by heart; Diderot praised to the skies. Less important planets of science, and beyond them still lesser, circled round the really great men who had attained world fame as encyclopedists. For a short time Beaumarchais considered associating himself with a famous scholar, seeking the protection of one of these great men of learning—in the same

way, as a man of business, he had accepted the patronage of a financier. But he realised that, though his purse was willing, his mind was not.

With his usual instinct for the future he chose the protection of public opinion instead of an individual patron. A contemporary declared that "writers and adventurers were more closely in touch with society than they had been." Beaumarchais had been an adventurer, and his adventurous life, rather than the titles he had acquired, had associated him with all classes of society. But as an author he was a dilettante, who had written only on special occasions. He must study literature, the construction of plays, as he had learned the watchmakers' trade and the art of making money.

His failures in Spain had taught him that to succeed in any craft a man must acquire knowledge; he must know his trade so intimately that his knowledge becomes a part of himself and is never obvious.

Formerly he went to the theatre for pleasure; he had been amused by the rapid movement of the plot and by the spoken words. Now he read a play before he went to see it; he analysed it and reconstructed each scene. He learned how to write a play, the higher mathematics of human destinies, which work into each other like a wheelwork, and which, together, make up human life.

When one of his dramas displeased the former watchmaker, or when he considered the construction inadequate, he searched for mistakes in it, just as he had looked for them in his clocks. He was soon able to find his mistakes quickly, to alter scenes, and to test his changes according to the effect of the play.

He did not take his career as a writer quite seriously. He knew that he was gifted, but he was not completely sure of himself, for to him authorship was a profession. Business continued to overshadow his other interests. He tried to follow up his Spanish plans, which had become more modest and more realistic, and he was hoping for new possibilities in France.

Again, Beaumarchais might have turned aside from his desk, if he had not needed writing as a diversion in his active life. For the first time he was seriously moved by an occurrence outside his professional interests.

Pauline no longer received him as her fiancé, she was Mademoiselle de Breton; her ever-present aunt, too, was haughty and unapproachable. He thought at first that they were displeased because he had not written more often. Then, when they did not comment on this remission, he interpreted their reticence as the sensitive gesture of women who could not fulfil his expectations. The relative sent by Beaumarchais to San Domingo had died on the journey; the reports about Pauline's estates were not entirely clear or satisfactory. He was not sure that by marrying her he would lay the foundations for tremendous wealth; he thought that she was sacrificing herself so that he need not marry a poor wife. When, attracted afresh by her charm, he tried to persuade her that he wanted to marry her anyway, she declared that he had once been more interested in her fortune. Where was her devoted tenderness?

The Chevalier, Julie's fiancé, too, no longer "desired his bride as tenderly and as passionately as an archangel." He was seen more frequently with Mademoiselle de Breton than with Mademoiselle de Beaumarchais. This created a troubled atmosphere in the rue de Condé, and Beaumarchais decided to end this ambiguous situation. Once more he formally asked for Pauline's hand in marriage.

When the answer came he was convinced that he would soon marry again. He opened the envelope, the letter dropped from his hand. A refusal? A rebuff? To him? This insignificant girl from the Provinces dared refuse him, the Lieutenant-General of the Royal Hunts, a business man with far-reaching influence, who could have possessed all the women at the Court (and many of whom he had indeed known, as he confesses with self-satisfaction)? She

dared to say no to his yes : Her feeling for him had changed ? He had pretended not to notice what was going on whenever he had met Pauline with the Chevalier—so that was the cause for her refusal. This man, who wormed his way into the house by pretending that he intended to marry Beaumarchais' favourite sister, had stolen his bride.

Beaumarchais was furious. He had written that he loved himself in his bride, that he loved her choice of a man, which justified his own preference for himself. His vanity was hurt. While he was contemplating his revenge on the seducer, he received a letter from the Chevalier in which, as a true Rococo cavalier, he offered to give his rival satisfaction in a duel. Beaumarchais reproached Pauline; she replied that she had not been told that the Chevalier intended to marry her. Would she marry him now that Beaumarchais had made her aware of this possibility ? “The blood is boiling in my veins,” Beaumarchais wrote, “not that, above all, not that.”

In his imagination his passion for Pauline increased. What would his friends say when they learned that his bride had left him shortly before the wedding ? His hurt vanity, his outraged self-assurance, the miseries of a jealous man in love, all these urgent and conflicting emotions caused him to write letters which could never have made Pauline change her mind, especially as she was increasingly attracted by the Chevalier's mediocrity.

She was repelled by Beaumarchais' changeability. At one moment he caressed her gently, the next he was frighteningly passionate. Then, quite suddenly, he would talk to her in a dry business-like tone. She was repelled by the violence of his nature; when he was emotionally involved he lost his self-control completely. The *petite-bourgeoise* suddenly longed to escape from this excitable man, who had attracted her while she had been in love with him. She was afraid for her new fiancé. She knew that Beaumarchais was influential, she did not under-estimate his power. But she was also

aware that her entreaties would not move him; she must be firm, show him that she would not be shaken.

When, in one letter, Beaumarchais made a disparaging remark about the Chevalier, Pauline wrote that she did not wish him to forget the consideration due a man who was her friend. She remained firm, but she was afraid of her former fiancé, and she therefore asked a cousin, an abbé, to see him for her. With the cleverness of all father confessors, he comforted Beaumarchais. He reminded him that Pauline was young and inexperienced; that was why she had chosen the less desirable of the two men, why she had preferred an insignificant position in life to a more prominent one. She would lose more than Beaumarchais, though they had seemed made for each other. "But man proposes and God disposes."

Beaumarchais had long ago lost faith in God. In common with the philosophers he had elected Reason as his Deity, and he accepted the consequences of this point of view. He had loved Pauline and she had responded to his love. He had given her money and she had not returned it to him. Their personal relationship had been give and take, but their accounts had to be settled. What was love after all? A self-love transferred to another human being. He tried to forget his bride by philosophising playfully, but he made it difficult for himself to do so. It took time to settle their accounts.

Beaumarchais' demands seemed exorbitant. Pauline still owed him twenty-four thousand *livres*. But for this sum he would have put her out of his mind and history would have heard no more about her.

But when she married the Chevalier, his love-letters from her became a business-like *dossier* which the cashier Beaumarchais kept; a bill, as it were, for the love reflected in these letters: twenty-four thousand *livres*. In the balance sheet, which the scorned bridegroom drew up every year, this sum was always listed among uncertain debts. An enclosed letter from Pauline indicates that she did not consider this debt as uncertain, for she wrote a few years later:

“ Monsieur de Beaumarchais can sleep peacefully, he will be paid.”

When his old letters were found he was already sleeping his eternal sleep. But he had not been paid this sum.

His family idyll had collapsed; Beaumarchais' hopes for a happy home had been shattered. Though this was not modern, and he admitted as much, he sought comfort in the world of pleasure. He frequented the *salons* of actresses, the hospitable homes of Mesdemoiselles Guimard and Clairon, which were almost public-houses. Foppishly dressed, he participated in the orgies arranged by men, not accepted by respectable society. The *demi-monde* was still imitating the King, and the *petite maison* continued to be modelled after Louis XV's Deer Park.

Beaumarchais did not live as he wrote. Not only did he express his spiritual disappointment: his inventive temperament, his interest in everything that was new, caused him to approach the dramatic style known as the “bourgeois tragedy.” He belonged to Diderot's school of thought; his *Natural Son* had revolutionised literature.

By his very title, however, Beaumarchais wanted to announce that he had created a completely original style, despite the fact that Diderot had influenced him. He was the first playwright of the age to call his play *Eugénie* a “drama.” He took this expression from classic antiquity, but this was his only link with the past. “What concern of mine,” he wrote in the introduction to *Eugénie*, “are the revolutions of Athens and of Rome? I am a peaceful subject of a monarchy in the eighteenth century.”

He wanted to present contemporary life; he described events that might happen to anyone in his audience to-day or to-morrow. “A spectator is particularly moved by a misfortune similar to one he himself is suffering.” Beaumarchais had given up ingratiating himself at the Court by showing Court life on the stage. He wanted

the people to see popular plays, dealing with the happiness and misfortune of a poorer class of society—though he was not concerned with the really poor. The time for the really poor had not yet come. The poverty of nine-tenths of the population, the miserable existence of the entire peasantry, which amounted to slavery, was not generally understood. Unconsciously, by revolutionising the theatre, Beaumarchais was preparing the way for the great Revolution.

He was contemplating improvements. The language of the stage was to be as simple as that in daily use. Dialogue was to be as natural as possible, the plot developed in the play was to carry conviction. The only colour permissible in the drama was the forceful expression of human passions. The theories put forward by Beaumarchais were based on a superficial study. Here and there the new dramatist had picked up a phrase or a theory, and with a sure hand he constructed a mosaic very similar to Diderot's theory of dramatic art. He did his best to live up to his theories. He observed life, in order to present it dramatically; wherever he was, in his solemn robes of office, sitting in judgment in the Louvre, driving to Versailles and talking to courtiers, or at Duverney's or in the offices of other financiers, listening to their conversation, he observed life.

A novel would have been incompatible with his temperament; the hard work necessary to develop his plot, the detailed construction would have been impossible for him. He preferred immediate effects. He had no time to wait for his success. The spoken word, used in daily life, the dialogue which he mastered perfectly, was his chosen form of dramatic expression. He knew by experience what phrases are effective, what witticisms make people laugh, what sad passages stimulate the human tear-ducts. He could influence the moods of his audience, just as he knew how to handle the strings of many musical instruments. His adjustability had made of him a man with many personalities. He had played num-

rous rôles, he was capable of acting in many more. In every one he was a different creature, but at the same time he was always his own Ego, which he loved.

The action of the drama did not matter. All that mattered was that something happened, that he populated a section from the multifariousness of life with acting persons, each of which he was or might have been himself. As a man he had stood the test of the many costumes he had worn, of the situations he had experienced; he had known women in all phases of pleasure, in all stages of grief.

"I took my plot from the little Spanish story in Count de Bellflore's *Diable Boiteux*. I quickly wrote the rough draft of this play, sketching an outline of the situations and characters, and I was not discouraged. But when I began to sift my material, I was frightened by the difficulties involved in the arduous detail work, and gave up the drama and the theme."

He had been dallying. It was over. His efforts had been as ineffectual as the verses he had written to please some mistress or to win the favour of some patron. Beaumarchais was not a professional writer. A new business opportunity presented itself to him. One transaction after another kept him from his desk. He began to study forestry. Duverney was putting him in charge of a huge forest domain; lumber was a great source of wealth.

Again, the history of his age encroached upon his life. This time history delayed his career as a writer. How could he write plays when one exciting scene followed another at the Court, when, so it seemed, a career was open to a man who remained close at hand to observe events at Versailles. An old acquaintance, for instance, the Comte Jean Dubarry, had made his fortune from one day to the next, that is to say, during the night which lay between. He had brought his own mistress to the King, and in return he had received two hundred thousand *livres* in cash. The young woman had remained in Versailles, where she had hurriedly moved into a luxurious apartment. The Duc d'Ayen, who was particularly

malicious, had ventured to tell the King that as a king, Louis XV was no more the successor of Pharaoh than he was the successor of the Comte Dubarry in the long list of lovers whom this Jeanne Vaubernier had known. This may not have been her real name. It was more probably Jeanne Lange, and this name may have been given her by her first lover, who had called her "L'Ange"—Madame de Pompadour's successor was anonymous, a woman who emerged from the unknown.

The King who had lived with a bourgeoisie for twenty years now associated with the people; he came into direct contact with the streets. His personal intimacy with her would have been forgiven. But when this Jeanne, hastily married by the Comte Dubarry to his brother so that she would have a title and a rank, was appointed as *maîtresse en titre*, even the Parisians were annoyed. In Versailles one group of the courtiers supported the Dubarry, another was against her. Men who were in any way associated with the world of pleasure were ostracised by the anti-Dubarryists. People were afraid that, following the Pompadour's example, the Dubarry would bring her own friends to the Court. The aristocrats had tolerated men like Duverney, but the dukes and duchesses, proud of their ancestry, refused to be on intimate terms with men and women who frequented the houses of pleasure or the gambling tables. They decided to be exclusive, to boycott the dangerous influx of these new elements to Versailles.

This exclusiveness was also directed against the upstarts who had come to Versailles during the Marquise de Pompadour's régime, and who had never really been accepted as equals by the courtiers. So the Court was antagonistic towards Beaumarchais. When *Mesdames* refused to receive him, he decided to confine his need for protection to Madame Adelaide. But when he asked for her, the door porter told him to consult the Duc de la Vrillière. A liveried servant conducted him to his old enemy, the Comte de St. Florentin, who had inherited the title after his father's death, and who was now the

Duc de la Vrillière. The Minister of the Royal Household told Beaumarchais without mincing matters that he was not to call on the royal Princesses again.

Beaumarchais is said to have remarked in reply that in view of his youth, his handsome appearance, and his social talents, which charmed all women, it was not surprising that the Court was afraid he might turn Madame Adelaide's head. He decided, not without self-irony, that as a man he would never accomplish what the Pompadour and more recently the Dubarry had accomplished as women.

The outlook for the future seemed hopeless, and the nights he spent at the gambling tables or the small, incredibly luxurious houses of pleasure began to bore him. The monotony of his life made his heart feel empty, and this in turn emptied his mind. Beaumarchais was tired of excesses, and he did not regret that the Court was closed to him. He had found a compensation for the diversions of Versailles, a diversion more in keeping with the spirit of the age. He had met Prince de Conti, who had retired from life at the Court. Beaumarchais was welcomed in Conti's house as an interesting companion, and because he, too, was unpopular at Court. Beaumarchais realised that to hold his own among these serious people he must contribute some serious achievement.

Sheets of paper lay on his desk; the sketches for his drama *Eugénie*. He resumed his efforts, and submitted to the "dull detail work" involved. He did not know how this happened, but suddenly he remained at his desk day and night. Petitioners and contractors were no longer admitted to his levée; he ate his meals alone, he did not receive or go out riding. Yes, he went so far as to forgo the meticulous care he usually devoted to his person. His hair was so long that he could not have worn a wig over it, his beard had grown. He read and wrote.

Several gilded coaches were already standing at the pavement

when Monsieur de Beaumarchais' carriage stopped before the Temple, Prince de Conti's palace. A large reception had been arranged. In his Court dress with a jabot of lace, and again wearing a huge wig, his hat under his arm, Beaumarchais entered the drawing-room. He was taken to an arm-chair on a small platform. A table, on which stood a silver candlestick, was in front of him. A servant had placed an opened scroll of parchment on the table. The ladies and gentlemen sat down to listen while the author read his play. Not a tragedy—a "drama," Beaumarchais emphasised once more.

The plot was exciting. A great gentleman had seduced the daughter of a country squire, and had staged a mock marriage in order to allay the suspicions of the ever-present aunt who was a second mother to Eugénie. (Was it Pauline's aunt—and was "Eugénie" Mademoiselle de Breton?) The fine gentleman's love-affair was not without consequences. Eugénie realises that she will be a mother, and follows him to the capital. But she arrives at an inopportune moment. The fine gentleman is about to marry one of the most aristocratic and wealthy heiresses in the country. His marriage to Eugénie was a comedy. The father wishes to revenge his daughter's honour. But the unfaithful lover repents. The couple are reunited.

The aristocrats at Prince de Conti's were listening to episodes which had actually occurred in their own lives. The drama consisted of incidents, well knit together and lightly told, which the author had heard or experienced. True, Beaumarchais exaggerated the seriousness of the situation, for the destiny of Eugénie and her lover did not seem particularly tragic to this aristocratic audience. Some of them had actually experienced similar episodes. But the drama stimulated them. The plot seemed original, because Beaumarchais interpolated descriptions between the scenes, thus enlivening the silent action on the stage. He approached reality, furthermore, because his drama was not

written in verse; instead, his characters spoke as the audience might have spoken.

At this time many influential men received letters from Monsieur de Beaumarchais, whom they had met casually or whom they knew by reputation. He asked them to allow him to read *Eugénie*, an "entirely original drama," at their homes. The Duc d'Orleans, the Duc de Noailles, the Duc de Nivernais, all of them were urged to invite their men and women friends to hear this theatrical miracle before it was performed on the stage. His publicity was excellent. The Parisians were curious to see the play which the members of the governing classes had already heard.

Beaumarchais was extremely active. He negotiated with the actors of the *Comédie française*, he drove to see as many patrons as he could find so that, at the sensational first night, the stalls and the boxes would be crowded with people representing the greatest names in France. A difficulty arose at the last moment before the first performance. The censorship wanted the scene of the play to be England and not France. The censors feared that some courtier might think he was the hero, and this, so the censors believed, would have meant a Revolution.

The spectators were more reserved in their judgment of the play than the censors had been. What could be expected of an author who, though he had so far not been involved in a real scandal, had been known as an intriguer, a busybody, a watchmaker, a courtier, and a financier; this man was said to be rich, but no one knew the source of his riches, and his curious relationship with the Princesses was common knowledge. What had this quick-change artist to do with literature?

Professional writers were particularly angry. "What sort of a wasps' nest had they come upon?" Literary men and their followers, great critics and insignificant reporters joined forces and attacked Beaumarchais. They considered the performance of *Eugénie* an impudent invasion of their kingdom.

They attacked him blindly. Baron de Grimm, for instance, who had bought his own title, ridiculed Beaumarchais for having purchased his. "Grimm stood in the audience, wearing a wig, his face made up with white and red paint, looking like an old cocotte," ready to sharpen his pen against the *parvenu* on the stage and already thinking of the phrase: "This man will never create anything, not even mediocrity." The audience's attitude seemed to support Baron de Grimm's opinion. "Never has an audience been so antagonistic towards an author," Collé, the author, wrote; "I am speaking of his person and not of his play," he added.

While the critics and the audience were opposing him, Beaumarchais was behind the scenes wondering how he could improve the play, for during the performance he had noticed several mistakes. He was extremely optimistic, and he felt that a play which had not pleased the public to-day might be a success to-morrow. He had written *Eugénie* to amuse himself. "I have not the advantage of being an author, and I have neither the talent nor the time to become a writer." In view of the fact that he had written his drama as a hobby, it did not seem too bad as compared with plays which had been the life-work of others.

The next day he studied the criticisms and made some changes in the play. The second performance of *Eugénie* pleased an audience which had come to see the drama rather than the author.

Despite the critics' protests, Beaumarchais had achieved his aim. He was being discussed, he was no longer an unknown author. He would be able to try his luck with another drama, he would ultimately force the public to respect him as a dramatist.

Again he retired to his rooms, where he spent his free time at his desk. A second drama, *The Two Friends*, was the result. A new world, as yet unknown to the French theatre public, would, he believed, make his audience acknowledge his importance as a writer. The theme was business, trade, the process of earning money, the moral standards of a merchant, as opposed to the aristocrat's

point d'honneur. He wrote this play "in honour of the Third Estate."

For the first time this phrase was used in literature. Public opinion liked to ignore this Third Estate, the lower orders were merely an audience watching Court life. For the first time the Third Estate was to appear on the stage, the lower classes would, in turn, be observed by the courtiers. Was Beaumarchais himself a character in this play, protesting against the Court's disdainful attitude towards himself? Obviously not. For though he was revolutionary by nature, he himself was unconscious of this fact. In this unawareness, too, he was a child of his age.

The failure of *Eugénie* had made him lonely. He did not want to appear in public before he had been successful. At this time he met Geneviève Leveque, a widow of his own age. She had inherited a considerable fortune from her first husband, who had been the Director of the Royal Wardrobe. She was rich. For Beaumarchais this was the essential consideration. It was better for him that she accepted him only on condition that he would not neglect her. "Do not let me weep in a lonely bed." Perhaps to live with a woman who loved him, to have children, to increase his wealth, was to mean happiness at last. He had long ago ceased to desire honour and glory. What is honour? He answered this question by avoiding the society of others, by devoting himself to his wife, and to making money.

Geneviève was expecting a child. She could not go with Beaumarchais to the forests which he was clearing for Duverney. He sat about in rustic river-houses, and his one diversion was the daily letter he wrote to her. He was very busy. He was supervising the labour of two hundred workmen in the Chinon forest, an area of two hundred and eighty acres. He inspected the felling and the shipment of the trees, he supervised the pressing of four hundred thousand hundredweights of hay. He purchased horses and wagons; fifty ships were waiting for their cargoes. This task demanded

de Beaumarchais' intellectual powers, his attention, and his constant presence. The bare walls, the primitive furniture, did not disturb this man who was accustomed to luxury; he enjoyed the fertile summer, the view on to the green valleys and the hills. He breathed in the fragrance of the meadows. He lived in the style prescribed by Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

He surrendered himself to his feeling for nature, he breathed deeply of the vast forests, but nevertheless he flirted with his surroundings, so unusual for a courtier, who had been born and bred in Paris. He wrote tenderly to his Geneviève, but he remembered to remind her to tell their relatives and friends where he was. "Beaumarchais in the world of nature."

In the meantime his child was born. "My son, my son," he wrote; "I laugh with joy when I think that I am working for him." The versatile quick-change artist in his own life devoted himself to acting the rôle of a father.

The first performance of the play *The Two Friends* was a failure. The audience and the critics did not praise the author. It was said that this play, *The Two Friends*, was written by a man who had none. The courtiers were displeased because insignificant persons like merchants appeared on the stage. But he welcomed this opportunity to slap the aristocracy in the face, and one of his characters declares: "What profession is equal to that of a man who, by the stroke of a pen, can make other men obey him from one end of the world to the other? Such a man is really a citizen of the world. What an aristocrat attains by the privilege of birth is the basis of a merchant's respected position in life: integrity and honour."

The privilege of birth? Beaumarchais no longer resented his own. Let them whistle, or laugh. He quoted a line from the dialogue of his play on the title-page: "What will you reply when they

judge you falsely, when they insult you, tell lies about you ?"—
" Nothing ! "

He took no notice of the fact that he had been rebuffed. Only the world of trade was open to him. He destroyed his last bridges to the Court. While he had money, while he was earning money, they would come to him, they would compliment him at his levée ; he would drive in his own carriage, he would amass riches for his wife and for his child. Money is more valuable than honour and glory, he decided at thirty-eight. And whimsically he came to the conclusion that a man cannot feel contempt for money unless he possesses money.

PART III

A FORTUNE-HUNTER IN MISFORTUNE

CHAPTER I

GENEVIÈVE DE BEAUMARCHAIS was thirty-eight when her first child was born. She lived like a great lady, spending the winter in the magnificent house in the rue de Condé, the summer at Pantin, her country estate. She was proud to be the wife of a man who, though a writer of depressing plays, was always happy, a man whose many professional interests never caused him to neglect her. People maligned Beaumarchais, but they were obviously wrong, for he was not what strangers took him to be. He could not be an irresponsible pleasure-seeking creature, for he rejoiced at every lulling utterance of his infant; he was happiest with her and the child, with his father and his sisters.

Happy in her husband's love, Geneviève realised that, despite his reputation as an adventurer, he longed for a well-ordered life. His pleasures were harmless. He was fond of music, and he organised amateur theatricals. When he staged his bright plays he preferred the approval of a small circle of friends to the applause of a large audience. The theatres of the annual fairs, the *Théâtre de la Foire*, which he had known in his youth, had become popular, and had won a new public in the *Théâtre français*. Increasingly, the entire nation wanted to be amused. Life was hard, and people had ceased to want "a mirror of sadness" on the stage; instead they enjoyed laughter and wit. The public liked the new "parades" and their malicious comments on the men who were responsible for the critical conditions in France. "The population grumbled about the situation so that they need not organise a serious revolution." Perhaps this kind of fault-finding was allowed because the censorship appreciated its value: it was a safety-valve.

Beaumarchais followed the fashion, and no longer wrote tragedies. Gay irony was more natural to him than sentimentality. In his imagination he relived his merry adventures in Spain. But

he did not write. He contented himself with his witty ideas—especially as they were directed against the régime and showed contempt for the aristocracy which had not accepted him as an equal.

His peaceful life made him feel secure. His wife was expecting a second child. He already saw himself as the happy father of a family, like Father Caron. True, he was living on a higher plane of life; he was the ancestor of a generation which would attain what he and his own forebears had not achieved. Only one anxiety depressed him. His transactions with Paris Duverney had been verbally arranged. Beaumarchais had no receipts for the payments he had made to Duverney; the financier, in turn, had none from him. Duverney was a frail old man, and he would soon be eighty-seven. He might die at any moment. Beaumarchais decided that he must settle his accounts with the financier, whom he had seen less and less often during recent years.

His letter to Duverney suggesting a meeting remained unanswered. He drove to Duverney's house, but he was not admitted. Not until he had sent two or three urgent letters was he informed that Duverney would see him, but in secret. His heir, the Comte de la Blache, who was his favourite nephew, "hated Beaumarchais as passionately as he loved his bride." If Duverney asked Beaumarchais to his home, his nephew would reproach him, and the old man did not wish to embitter the last days of his life.

Beaumarchais remembered a letter he had written to Duverney, an indiscreet letter. He had advised the old financier to appoint his nephew Paris Demezieu as his sole heir. Above all, he had urged him not to entrust his affairs to la Blache. He had avoided the Count after their very first meeting. There is hate, as well as love, at first sight.

Duverney was senile and stubborn, and he paid no attention to Beaumarchais' warnings. The Comte de la Blache was appointed as his heir, and as his executor as long as he lived. Duverney did

not agree to discuss the matter with his former friend until Beaumarchais pleaded with him to appoint another trustee at least for the liquidation of their joint business interests.

Beaumarchais did not care what was done behind the arrogant nephew's back, as long as he could settle his accounts with Duverney. Beaumarchais noted the debits and the credits on a piece of parchment, and took it to the financier, who signed it with trembling old fingers.

When this final settlement of their accounts had been signed by the financier, Beaumarchais thought that his future was secure. His own fortune and that of his wife provided him with an income of about twenty thousand *livres*. Besides, he earned twice this sum, and he was in the prime of life.

Geneviève died in childbirth and the infant did not live. Then Beaumarchais' first-born son died as well. It was as though destiny had turned against him just when he had been feeling safer than he had ever felt before. Shortly afterwards Duverney died, and Beaumarchais heard that the Comte de la Blache was contesting the deceased's debt to him, though a considerable sum was clearly recorded in their settlement. The heir declared Duverney's signature to be a forgery. He demanded of Beaumarchais one hundred and thirty-nine thousand *livres* which, so he claimed, Beaumarchais owed the estate.

Once more Beaumarchais' life had collapsed. He had lost everything he had loved. His fortune was threatened by la Blache's demands. Not only that, enemies whom he had completely forgotten sprang up round him. His first wife's family renewed their demands, though he had settled these disputes after the death of the former Madame Franquet. He produced documents to prove it, but her relatives, like la Blache, stated that they were forgeries. His second wife's estate, too, was contested, and he was asked to pay

sums larger than her legacy. Enemies appeared from everywhere. The attack on him was systematically organised. Suddenly slanderers accused him of poisoning, not only the respectable Monsieur Pierre Augustin Franquet and Madame Franquet, the first Madame Beaumarchais, but Geneviève Leveque, his second wife as well. Even Voltaire's defence of him made no impression; he had said: "A man as gay as Beaumarchais cannot belong to the guild of locusts." Voltaire could not believe that Beaumarchais had poisoned anyone. It did not help him when Prince de Conti and other loyal supporters spoke in his favour. With the exception of these few faithful friends, all of Paris was against him. People avoided him wherever he went; when he spoke to anyone, he was ignored.

This misfortune, which overtook him so unexpectedly and from so many sides, had shaken him completely. Did destiny want to revenge herself on him? Why? Was he to be punished because he had taken life lightly? Was destiny balancing her accounts by secretly inflicting revenge on him for his consistent gaiety? He must not remain passive, he must not let fate get the better of him. The Comte de la Blache declared that it was a point of honour, not only to get the one hundred and thirty-nine thousand *livres*, but that he must ruin Beaumarchais as well. La Blache desired a battle for life or for death—he should have his wish.

Beaumarchais, now profoundly shaken, composed himself with a tremendous effort. "I learned how to calm my soul at the most trying moments of my life. Life means passing away. Every human being is carried to his grave when his time is over." His wife had died after a few short years of happiness with him. His child was no longer alive. He was very unhappy, but he knew that to go on living he must master his grief.

He brought an action against the Comte de la Blache and waited. He could not deal with his other enemies until this case was settled. The rumours undermining his reputation would be

forgotten, he would again be accepted by the indiscriminating society of his age.

Once more, as he always did when he was beset by difficulties, he escaped to his desk. It satisfied and amused him to analyse himself in his misfortune.

When Beaumarchais carefully wrote the title of his new comedy — *The Barber of Seville* — on the title-page, he did not know that this play would make him famous for centuries.

He hoped to forget his own failures by recording the success of others. He described the woman whom he longed to meet; himself as he would have liked to be; himself as he really was; he described the wicked people who were plotting against him, and how a man can escape these pursuers. In this crisis he expressed his own optimism in a musical comedy. Life was giving him sufficient opportunity to weep; he needed gaiety in his plays. He included in his plot all the merry confusions of personalities, all the amusing incidents of his theatrical youth, the memories of his journey to Spain.

His audience was to be convinced that Pierre Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais could not be affected by the vicissitudes of fate. His audience was to think that he was always gay, no matter what happened to him. Above all, he must hide his tears, he must continue to laugh — “*Tout fini par des chansons.*”

When his period of mourning was over, Beaumarchais again visited the dressing-rooms at the theatre, the literary *salons*, where he walked about, arm in arm with aristocrats. His smile was calm, he did not look like a widower, his expression did not betray the fact that he had lost his child, or that his entire existence was at stake.

Gudin de la Brennererie, the young author, had become almost tenderly attached to him. This modest and dreamy man was very fond of Beaumarchais, who was so brilliant and so worldly, and he

volunteered his services as Beaumarchais' secretary. Gudin supported Beaumarchais in a most unselfish manner. He introduced Beaumarchais to influential people in the literary world, and arranged for his friend to read *The Barber of Seville* to the *Comédiens Italiens*.

The actors and the actresses were enchanted with the comedy. But though they themselves had obviously enjoyed it, they rejected it in a few days.

Beaumarchais did not understand why they had done so. He was aware, however, that since the reading Clairval, the most popular actor of the day, treated him coolly. What had he done to offend the great actor? Was he another enemy? Had he annoyed him by some witty remark? Was he one of those who would respond to a pinprick with a cudgel?

On the evening when he heard that the *Comédiens Italiens* had rejected *The Barber of Seville*, Beaumarchais was the guest of Madame Dumesnil, the singer. The names of the other guests are remembered in the history of literature: Sedaine, Marmontel, Chamfort.

These writers were not in the least what their readers imagined them to be. They drank more than they talked. They did not begin their "intellectual conversation" until they were drunk, *entre deux vins*.

In this merry atmosphere, Beaumarchais was asked to read passages from *The Barber of Seville*. He was depressed by the rejection from the *Comédiens Italiens*. He wanted a sound judgment of his play, and he welcomed this opportunity to read it aloud. He began, and the floating atmosphere of intoxication in the room blended with his audience's amusement at the comedy, at the dashing lines, the sentimental songs. The applause was tremendous. Beaumarchais stopped after the third act. He had been reading the lines of his character Basilius: "Who can be deceived, all the world knows the truth." Then he asked whether Sedaine, the successful writer of comedies, Chamfort, who had such a profound knowledge of human nature, or Marmontel, the novelist, could tell him why

the *Comédiens Italiens* had rejected *The Barber of Seville* : The gay party round the table repeated merrily : " Who can be deceived, the whole world knows the truth." Why was *The Barber of Seville* rejected by the *Comédiens* : This was not surprising, they told Beaumarchais, laughing. Before he became an actor Clairval himself had been a barber, and he did not like to be reminded of this chapter of his past. He did not want to lather soap in public.

Chamfort, Marmontel, and Sedaine offered to arrange a performance of *The Barber of Seville* at the *Théâtre français*, where they were well known. Shortly afterwards the play was accepted, and it was to be produced a few weeks later at carnival time.

At last he had been lucky again, but Beaumarchais was not really happier, his gaiety was an illusion. He was to have reason to remember this fact. His evenings, after a hard day's work, were systematically planned. One evening he called on Madame Dumesnil, on the next he went to see Madame Mesnard, another singer. The home of Madame Dumesnil was the meeting-place of the intellectual *élite*, Madame Mesnard received the *élite* of society, the aristocracy, and the aristocracy of money.

Madame Mesnard had been the Duc de Chaulnes' mistress until she met Beaumarchais. Then she had preferred the writer. The singer had found the moody brutality of this rich duke and peer of France unbearable. She had dismissed him abruptly, although the Duke had acknowledged her little daughter as his child. To escape from his insistent demands, Madame Mesnard had retired temporarily to a convent. She did not leave her solitary retreat to return to the great world until she was sure that the Duke would bother her no more.

The deserted lover blamed Beaumarchais for his misfortune. He made an effort to confirm this opinion. He tried to quarrel with Beaumarchais. He joined his rival's enemies—despite the fact that he had no proofs that Beaumarchais was actually Madame Mesnard's lover. The versatile man repelled the Duke and at the

same time he attracted him. Chaulnes was spoiled, and incapable of mastering his own emotional conflict. Besides, he was involved in a law-suit about his mother's legacy. In his confusion, he threatened to use force if Madame Mesnard did not come back to him of her own free will.

Instead of an answer from her he received a reply from Beaumarchais. Badly treated by destiny, he now grasped at every opportunity to demonstrate his superiority, for this gave him strength. So the singer had sent away the wealthy Duke, who had tried repeatedly to insult him, for his sake? He wrote to Chaulnes: "Madame Mesnard tells me that she is free. A heart as generous as hers cannot be won by threats, beatings, or money. Forgive me, Monsieur le Duc, if I permit myself observations of this kind." Beaumarchais had reason to ask the Duke's forgiveness. He listed the Duke's transgressions, and kept the most insulting allusion, his revenge for the aristocrat's jeering remarks about his bourgeois ancestry, for the end of his letter. A short time before, in connection with his legacy, Chaulnes had attacked his own mother in a pamphlet. Beaumarchais wrote to him: "I am proud of the members of my family, even in the presence of men who think they are justified in insulting theirs. . . . You can judge for yourself, Monsieur le Duc, which of us is in a more favourable position?" An impudent letter, in which Beaumarchais paid back the aristocratic Duke's irony with interest.

Perhaps this reproof was justified, but tactically it was a mistake. Beaumarchais soon realised that this letter, which had increased his self-respect, was to contribute to his humiliation.

Expressed in the most simple terms, the French Revolution was a struggle against the privileges of the aristocracy. Raised by the monarch to a high rank, the aristocracy had turned the King into an illusion. The Dukes and Counts enjoyed exemption from taxes

and other prerogatives, whereby they exploited the population and made social progress impossible. Beyond that, their mode of life and their arrogance had usurped for the aristocracy privileges which caused discontent even among the most patient members of the lower classes. The Duc de Chaulnes was an outstanding example of the unrestrained wilfulness of the aristocracy, a wilfulness upheld by the King and his ministers. There are several records of his behaviour in the "Beaumarchais case."

Early in the morning of the eleventh of February, 1773, Gudin, Beaumarchais' friend, dictated a statement to the police officer who had been summoned. Gudin declared that he had come to see Madame Mesnard, and that he had sat down in an arm-chair beside her bed. She had wept, complaining about the Duc de Chaulnes' brutality. She had been thinking of Beaumarchais as well, and she had therefore mentioned him. At that moment the Duke entered the room. Gudin continued: "'I am weeping,' Madame Mesnard said; 'and I want Monsieur Gudin to ask Monsieur de Beaumarchais to defend himself against the ridiculous accusations which are being made against him.'—'Why should a scoundrel like Beaumarchais,' the Duke answered, 'defend himself?'—'He is an honourable man,' Madame Mesnard replied.—'You love him,' Chaulnes exclaimed; 'I will challenge him to a duel at once.'"

Gudin hurried away to prevent the duel. He met Beaumarchais and called out to him: "The Duke is looking for you. He wants to challenge you to a duel. He wants to kill you." Beaumarchais shrugged his shoulders and said: "He will only kill his own fleas."

He drove calmly to the Louvre—it was the day on which he performed his duties as a "Lieutenant-General of the Royal Hunts." The Duc de Chaulnes was less composed. He was searching for his adversary, but instead he happened to meet Gudin. He had found a victim. He forced the young writer to get into his carriage.

The splendid coach with the Ducal coat of arms drove slowly through the streets. A strange sight was witnessed by the passers-

by. They saw an aristocrat suddenly strike the man sitting opposite him. When he defended himself, the aristocrat clutched his wig. Neither of the two men was slow, and while they were waving each other's wigs in the air, the carriage drove on at a dignified pace until the city guards intervened. A Duke was having a brawl? The guards respectfully requested the Duke to let Gudin go.

The maltreated writer escaped. "I had just opened the session in the Louvre," Beaumarchais testified later before the Marshal's Court, "when the Duc de Chaulnes arrived. I have never seen such an agitated human being. He shouted that he wanted urgently to speak to me, that I must leave the Court at once.—'I can't leave at once, Monsieur le Duc. My duties as a judge make it necessary for me to finish this session which I have just begun.'—In his robes of office, which emphasised his position, it was easy for Beaumarchais to restrain the Duke, who "was quite beside himself." While he settled one case after the other, Chaulnes walked about the room in intense excitement. He was obviously waiting for the moment when Beaumarchais would finish, for then, without insulting the King, in whose name Beaumarchais was acting as a judge, he could stab him. Chaulnes shouted again and again: "Will you be ready soon?"

While Beaumarchais coolly performed his duties, the Duke, in a loud voice, informed the two "Lieutenants of the Royal Hunts," the Comte Narcurelle and the Comte de Vintres, that he had come to fight a duel with Beaumarchais. The two Counts tried to calm the excited man. In the meantime Beaumarchais closed the session and spoke to Chaulnes graciously. "I challenge you to a duel at once; fight, or I'll make a scandal. There is no explanation you can give me," the Duke screamed. Beaumarchais remarked that he must get a suitable sword for the duel. Chaulnes realised that this was a reasonable suggestion.

An hour later the two adversaries sat opposite each other in the

dining-room of the Palace in the rue de Condé. Nicely cooked chops lay on the plates before them. Beaumarchais believed that he had calmed the Duke by his friendly approach. He urged him to eat. But he had forgotten that Chaulnes had been prepared for another kind of meal. He had threatened to drag Beaumarchais' heart from his body. Suddenly the Duke was overcome by his repressed fury. An angry brawl began, in which Beaumarchais' staff took part. But the huge aristocrat shook off the liveried servants, he broke the arm of one, cut another's cheek, and tore Beaumarchais' clothes to rags. Beaumarchais, in turn, scratched Chaulnes badly. The fight continued until Beaumarchais' sister summoned the police to separate the angry men.

The intervention of the police made it necessary to report this incident to the authorities. After all, Chaulnes was a peer of France, his honour was at stake because he had been in a common row. Beaumarchais, too, was a nobleman. The two should have fought a duel instead of hitting each other. But after asking his peers' advice, Chaulnes forgot about the duel. He preferred simply to state that he had not found the name "Beaumarchais" in any book of the peerage. Besides, so he pointed out, "Monsieur Caron" was involved in a criminal lawsuit, and if he ever heard that this fellow was slandering him again, he, the Duc de Chaulnes, would know how to punish him.

When the Minister of the Royal Household, the Duc de Vrillièr, heard about this incident, he banished Beaumarchais to the country. He was not concerned about the honour of this watchmaker's son, who crossed his path so often. But he wanted to prevent this duke and peer of France from taking part in another brawl, for such incidents demonstrated the wilfulness of the aristocracy in the eyes of the public. Beaumarchais had heard, however, that Chaulnes was saying in the theatre lobbies that he would kill him wherever he happened to find him. His departure from Paris would be regarded as a flight. He therefore declared that he would

not leave. The next morning he received a *lettre de cachet* forbidding him to leave his house.

He had to obey ; but while, at the Minister's command, he was detained in his own home, the Marshal's Court of Honour, which was obliged to take up the case when once it had become known, summoned him. The two orders he had received contradicted each other. The Marshals were informed that he was detained in his home, and the Minister's orders were temporarily rescinded so that he could appear before the Court.

After Gudin and the other witnesses had testified, after the two men had been confronted, Chaulnes was found guilty, and sentenced to imprisonment in Vincennes. Beaumarchais was acquitted.

He wanted to make sure that he was free and no longer under arrest. The Minister of Police confirmed the acquittal pronounced by the Court, but the Minister of the Royal Household wanted Beaumarchais to feel his power. A duke and peer of France had been imprisoned because he had beaten up a former watchmaker. Monsieur Caron, who had returned the Duke's blows, was at liberty. With the excuse that Beaumarchais had disobeyed the orders to remain in his home, thus violating the King's command, the Duc de Vrillièr ordered his arrest, and he was taken to the prison at the Fort L'Evèque. At the same time Chaulnes was released. Le Vrillièr simply ignored the fact that the Court of Marshals had taken the responsibility of permitting Beaumarchais to leave his home.

Beaumarchais was placed in the cell occupied a short time before by the actress Clairon when she refused to appear on the stage. The cell was comfortable, and the Duke intended to release him in a week. He merely wanted Beaumarchais to realise that the Minister of the Royal Household was powerful enough to imprison an influential man, even when there were no proofs of his guilt. In itself such a period of arrest was unimportant. Greater men than he had silently submitted to such acts of despotism, but he could not

accept this wilful privation of his freedom without resistance. “ . . . The King’s sacred name is such a beautiful institution that it cannot be made widely enough known. In every police-station men are tormented in the name of the King when they cannot be ill-treated with justice. The great wrong of being in the right is always a transgression in the eyes of a Power which likes to punish rather than to judge.” He lost his critical faculties, though he expected to suffer only the discomforts of a short period of imprisonment. His food was good, he was given ink, pens, and paper. He wrote letters, but the jests in them did not quite conceal his growing ill-humour. He was depressed by a feeling of fear, and as he did not want to surrender himself to evil forebodings about himself, he transferred the anxiety, which overcame him in his unaccustomed solitude, to the welfare of the King and the State.

In prison Beaumarchais had leisure to think quietly. One should no longer be contented with superficial grumbling, he thought. Events in France during recent years had demonstrated that the system of government was weakening. The ageing King had turned over his power to the Dubarry; she in turn had forced him to replace the Duc de Choiseul by her friends, the Duc de Aiguillon, the Chancellor Maupeou, the Finance Minister Terray. The Prime Minister had been dismissed overnight and banished to his country estate. His only transgression had been his refusal to submit to the Dubarry’s tyranny. This former prostitute, who wasted eighteen million *livres* in three years, was omnipotent. Even the Dauphin’s young wife, an Archduchess of Austria, Marie Antoinette, had been forced to talk to her.

When France accepted the partition of Poland, once her ally, without a murmur, when Maria Theresa, Catherine II of Russia, and Frederick the Great had divided this country amongst themselves without thinking it worth while to ask for France’s consent, all of Europe ridiculed Louis XV’s weakness of character. Frederick, who had formerly said: “ If I were King of France no cannon would

be fired in Europe without my consent," now made ironical remarks about "the little man" who had once been a mighty king.

People in France, too, were amused when Louis XV, so obviously attached to the Dubarry's apron strings, pompously declared: "My person alone personifies omnipotent, unified power." At first the King's omnipotence had been questioned by the Parliamentary Councillors, who had refused to act as judges. Some of the refractory councillors had been exiled, others had been arrested. Their offices were now held by men who were loyal to the King, that is to say, to the Dubarry. But this meant only a passing victory for Louis XV.

In common with all Parisians, Beaumarchais was aware that the struggle against the Parliaments might endanger the King's position. It was said, by the way, that the Dubarry had been able to maintain her royal lover's severity only by reminding him of Charles I of England. Did he want to be as weak as Charles and end on the scaffold?

CHAPTER II

DURING the reign of Louis XIV the functions of the Parliaments were confined to the civil law. They performed the purely formal duty of registering the laws which the King had promulgated. The *Roi du Soleil*'s outstanding personality, his statement that "*L'état c'est moi*" had caused the Parliamentary Councillors to forgo their power of veto. Immediately after this powerful monarch's death, however, the Parliament of Paris began to contest his will, and some of the clauses in it were eliminated on the grounds that they were unconstitutional. During the Regency, these members of the judiciary opposed the regulations supporting John Law's bank-note system, and after the collapse of the bank, their earlier resistance won for them the approval of the people. With a few far-sighted financiers they had not succumbed to the magic of inflation. They were popular because they were the only group opposing the Government.

When Louis XV arrested or banished the Parliamentary Councillors who disobeyed him, a storm of protest arose among the population; this was the first symptom of the approaching Revolution. The dismissed Councillors' influence grew, especially as the provincial parliaments supported them. The men who were appointed to their offices were so unpopular that they were not accepted entirely as equals even in the upper-class society from which they came. The *Fronde*, a party of *frondeurs*, or grumblers, was organised, and it opposed the unconstitutional methods which Maupeou, the Chancellor, adopted in the name of the King. These *frondeurs* held themselves aloof from the Court. Hands, for which the police searched in vain, attached posters at busy street corners. These posters demanded "Bread for two *sous*, Chancellor Maupeou shall be hanged—or there will be a revolt in Paris." These threats of unknown rebels were ignored, though after his dismissal, Choiseul, the

former Prime Minister, was on good terms with the banished Parliamentary Councillors. The time had not yet come for the great Revolution.

The Court still had money; the corruptible among the discontented could be bought. True, huge sums silenced the loud protests, but a violent though more inarticulate opposition continued, and was particularly strong among those who could not be bribed.

While Beaumarchais was in prison, the Comte de la Blache had lost his case in the lower court. He had appealed in a civil action to the Parliament of Paris, the highest court in the country. He had observed with pleasure his enemy's quarrel with the Duc de Chaulnes. It is possible that la Blache instigated this quarrel, and that the Duc de la Vrillière kept Beaumarchais in the Fort L'Evèque Prison to oblige this man who had inherited millions. It is definitely known that more than once the Minister of the Royal Household sold *lettres de cachet* for huge sums.

To win a civil lawsuit it was necessary to know the judge, that is to say, the Parliamentary Councillor in charge of the case. He had to be well informed, for his summing up finally decided the judgment passed.

While Beaumarchais was in prison—for a week, two weeks, three weeks—not knowing when his unjust term of imprisonment would finally end, the Comte de la Blache gave Goezmann, the Parliamentary Councillor in charge, a one-sided explanation of the case. To prejudice Goezmann against Beaumarchais, la Blache repeated to him the unsavoury episodes he had heard about his adversary's past. And he invented a few incidents as well. La Blache told the Councillor as a fact every unkind rumour he had ever heard about Beaumarchais; no incident was too trivial to be included in this report. Goezmann had the impression that Beaumarchais was “a poisonous weed from which society must be liberated.” La Blache strengthened his case by stating that Beaumarchais had forged Duverney's signature on their settlement. If the

Count succeeded in having Beaumarchais tried for forgery, his trial would be a criminal instead of a civil action. Beaumarchais would not only lose his fortune; he would also be branded as a criminal.

Beaumarchais did not know what was happening until the Minister's high-handed methods caused his imprisonment to be continued indefinitely. The Duc de Vrillière was so powerful that if he chose he could keep Beaumarchais in prison until the trial. Then he might leave the Fort L'Evèque, where he was imprisoned for a trivial quarrel, as a criminal, and be taken to a far more unpleasant prison.

As time passed Beaumarchais' anxiety increased. He had claustrophobia and he feared that he would never leave his cell, that nothing he could do would alter his fate. He wrote agitated letters to the Minister of Police, Monsieur de Sartines, whom he had met casually. In vain. The Duc de la Vrillière was unyielding. This man, usually so gallant to women, did not order Beaumarchais' release, even when Madame Mesnard offered him all her charms if he would do so.

Beaumarchais' situation was particularly critical, as he was the sole support of his family. He was unable to carry on his business. His fortune was invested in property and estates. His father and his sisters lived in his luxurious mansion, but they did not have enough money to buy the most necessary things. Men, whose customer Beaumarchais had been and who had become his creditors, suddenly seized his property. The Comte de la Blache's efforts to hunt him down had been completely successful. In despair, Beaumarchais wrote to the Duc de la Vrillière asking his permission to visit Goezmann, the Parliamentary Councillor. Beaumarchais explained that not only his own livelihood but that of his family was at stake. His letter was humble, and the Duke, believing that Beaumarchais' pride had been broken at last, allowed him to see the judge as often as necessary, if he was accompanied by a prison guard.

Victory was his. Beaumarchais was convinced that he would

win the Parliamentary Councillor's support if he had a chance to talk to him. After a brief call at his own home he went to the Judge's house. But the servant-girl who opened the door for him returned in a few minutes and said: "Monsieur Goezmann is not receiving to-day."

Beaumarchais, always optimistic, was encouraged by the slightest hope. If he could not see Goezmann to-day he would try again. But though he went frequently the Councillor would not talk to him. Beaumarchais realised that his case was lost. Time passed. The decisive day was near, and he did not underestimate the Comte de la Blache's influence. He himself, on the other hand, had not spoken to his Judge. His letters to Goezmann remained unanswered. In vain did he try to see him. On the third of April he made three futile attempts. When he was not admitted to the house, Beaumarchais left a note: "Beaumarchais requests the honour of an interview. He asks whether a message can be left with the door porter telling him on what day and at what time he may come." It was no use. The next day the same thing happened, but Beaumarchais' police guard noticed that the Parliamentary Councillor was at home, for he saw him at a window looking down at the carriage. Obviously, he was simply not "at home" to Beaumarchais.

In despair, Beaumarchais consulted his sister. Dairoles, a small financier, happened to be with her. He remembered that he knew Le Jay, a bookseller who published Goezmann's books on legal subjects. Le Jay was a friend of Goezmann's wife. She would arrange the desired interview for Beaumarchais, if he was willing to pay for it.

It was a complicated affair, and Gudin, who claimed always to have been present when his testimony was useful to his friend, said that Beaumarchais was outraged by this suggestion. He had won his case in the lower court, why should he buy an interview before it went to a higher court? It is not known whether Beaumarchais'

indignation was real or assumed, whether or not Gudin recalled it only when this case had become famous. The fact remains that Beaumarchais did not have the hundred *louisdors* which Madame Goezmann soon demanded of him, that his sister got this money for him and sent it to Le Jay through Dairoilles. When this sum had been given to the wife of the Parliamentary Councillor, he received Beaumarchais.

Their conversation was, however, short. Goezmann was antagonistic towards Beaumarchais from the beginning, and soon dismissed him. In despair, Beaumarchais asked Dairoilles to arrange a second meeting. Why not? But first Madame Goezmann must have a diamond watch. A diamond watch? All right. But, apart from this, she demanded fifteen *louisdors* for her husband's secretary. When Beaumarchais managed to get this sum for her, he was told to come to Monsieur Goezmann. He was assured that if the Councillor did not receive him, the watch and the money he had given his wife would be returned.

At the appointed time Beaumarchais drove to Goezmann's home, but he was not admitted to the house. The sentence was passed that same evening. Beaumarchais was sentenced to pay the sum demanded by la Blache, but the Court did not try him for forgery.

After the sentence had been pronounced Goezmann said to Beaumarchais' lawyer: "In these proceedings the character of the accused was taken into account more fully than was the case under consideration."

A few weeks later, after he had received a beseeching and respectful letter from Beaumarchais, the Duc de la Vrillièrre finally relented. La Blache had won his case. Chaulnes was now involved in a new scandal, no one cared whether the watchmaker's son was in prison or not.

When he left prison he was given a bill for the prison fare which

he had eaten with so little enjoyment. It was not easy for him to raise these few *louisdors*. All his property had been seized as security for his debts, and though the value of his estate exceeded the sum he now owed la Blache, nothing would be left for him after an auction. The bailiffs' daily fee amounted to five hundred *livres*, and they remained on duty until everything had been auctioned off. Beaumarchais had given his sister the diamond watch and the hundred *louisdors* which Madame Goezmann had returned to him. In his distress he remembered that she had failed to send him the fifteen *louisdors* which he had given her for her husband's secretary. He asked someone to remind her of this fact, but she emphatically refused to give him this sum.

Beaumarchais had to break up his home. But he walked through the streets holding himself upright, his wig on his head, his sword at his side ; faultlessly dressed, and telling everyone he met about the fifteen *louisdors* which Madame Goezmann had refused to pay back to him.

A bribe ? Did he say this money was a bribe ? He protested laughingly. But anyone hearing this story was made thoughtful ; the wife of a Parliamentary Councillor had kept fifteen *louisdors*. Wealthy people thought it probable that her husband knew nothing about it. The poor, on the other hand, to whom fifteen *louisdors* was a large sum, were sure that Goezmann himself had taken this money. Could anything else be expected of a Councillor of the new Parliament ?

Beaumarchais' story spread through the town like wildfire. Monsieur Goezmann applied his knowledge of cross-examinations to his own home. There is no doubt that this severe lawyer questioned his wife. But after her confession he promptly found an excuse to exonerate her. Beaumarchais, this disreputable scoundrel, had tried in vain to bribe his wife. He was not only a forger, he was corrupt as well. He was not merely an infamous adventurer, he was an ordinary criminal. A professional black-

mailer had tried to tempt the innocent wife of a respectable judge in the hope that her husband would abuse his legal powers.

Le Jay, the bookseller, was summoned. Intimidated by Goezmann's impressive demeanour, and subtly threatened by him, he wrote down a statement which was dictated to him by the Councillor. In it he declared that Goezmann had proudly and contemptuously refused to accept the presents which Beaumarchais had offered him. If Beaumarchais contradicted this fact he was lying; he was probably desperate because he had lost his case.

The Parliamentary Councillor ordered his carriage and got into it with his wife and the bookseller. In great dignity they drove to Versailles, where they were hoping to obtain a *lettre de cachet* against Beaumarchais. They were going to see the Duc de la Vrillière or the Minister of Police, Monsieur de Sartines, and they expected that Le Jay's testimony would result in Beaumarchais' conviction for bribery.

That morning, however, the Minister of the Royal Household did not feel like issuing a *lettre de cachet*. If he had decided to arrest Beaumarchais at this moment he might have postponed the French Revolution for years. But the unsuspecting man did not feel in the mood. He did not like Monsieur and Madame Goezmann. Perhaps, too, he believed that the two, who obviously wanted to anticipate any suspicion of bribery against themselves, had received more than fifteen *louisdors* from la Blache before the trial. La Vrillière turned his back on them.

Monsieur de Sartines received them no more graciously. The letters which Beaumarchais had written to the Minister of Police from prison, his few meetings with this charming man, had made Monsieur de Sartines like Beaumarchais. Sartines employed an army of spies, and this man, who was so well informed, who talked so intelligently and who had occasionally given him a clever hint, seemed more useful than this stiff Parliamentary Councillor and his dull wife. Sartines listened to Monsieur and

Madame Goezmann, read Le Jay's statement, and then he remarked, as though France had not been a judicial State, that this slip of paper, this statement, meant nothing. He asked the couple to drop the matter.

Monsieur and Madame Goezmann drove home, believing that they had vindicated their honour ; the affair seemed settled. But the President of the Paris Parliament, Monsieur Bethier de Sauvigny, the first official who was later a victim of popular fury at the beginning of the French Revolution, had heard about the "Goezmann affair." When Bethier de Sauvigny asked Beaumarchais to come and see him, however, he did not do so only because of this affair ; some of his friends had told him that he must meet this amusing and notorious man.

The gift of a diamond watch and fifteen *louisdors*—which, by the way, were not mentioned in Le Jay's statement—had not made it possible for Beaumarchais to see Goezmann, the Parliamentary Councillor, a second time. Now Bethier de Sauvigny, the President of the Parliament, had asked to see him. When he entered the drawing-room in this powerful official's home, he did not appear like Job, like a man who has lost everything for which he cared. His face reflected the good humour of an innocent man. "I have nothing," he said; "I am nothing, but your obedient servant."

He had the desired opportunity to explain the situation to the President. Bethier was convinced that there must be some truth in what he said. He instructed Goezmann to give Beaumarchais an opportunity of defending himself in public. Goezmann was therefore forced to ask the assembled Parliament whether an attempt to bribe the wife of a Councillor in order to be received by him in audience was an insult to the legislative body as a whole. Naturally the answer was "yes." As a result a motion was made to prosecute Beaumarchais.

The Court summoned witnesses in the "Beaumarchais case."

These witnesses had been directly or indirectly involved in his attempt at bribery, and they came of their own free will. A Monsieur Baculard d'Arnot, for instance, testified. He was involved in some trivial criminal case, and his Councillor "happened" to be Goezmann. In a letter to the Parliamentary Council he stated that Le Jay, the bookseller, had shown him the watch which Beaumarchais had asked him to offer Madame Goezmann. Of course, he said, the lady had declined indignantly. This letter was an accommodating contribution to the case, a counterpart to Le Jay's testimony.

Le Jay, however, had written his statement under pressure. He was now tormented by his conscience and by his wife in whom he had confided. Was he to commit perjury? To the honest bookseller this seemed the worst crime in the world. Monsieur Le Jay was not happy by day or by night. His wife nagged him until he consulted Gerbier, a lawyer, who reminded him of his duty as a man. The next day, therefore, Monsieur Le Jay came to the house of the Parliamentary Councillor in charge of the case. He knocked timidly, and then confessed at once that Goezmann had dictated his statement to him. It was a false statement.

While the marital struggle in the Le Jay household was being won for Beaumarchais, a journalist was busy trying to make peace between him and Monsieur and Madame Goezmann. Monsieur Marin, the editor of the *Gazette de France*, did not do so because he loved humanity. From the beginning of his career he had believed in one thing: if there was a stronger man in any struggle, be on his side. Monsieur Goezmann was a Parliamentary Councillor, he had been appointed by Maupeou; Beaumarchais was poor and had no influence. His position was already threatened by the judgment in the la Blache case, for implicitly he had been accused of forgery. It seemed obvious who was the stronger, whom Marin must support. He went first to Dairolles (it will be remembered that he acted as mediator between Beaumarchais and Le Jay) and asked him

to testify briefly when he was questioned. Above all, he was not to mention the incident about the fifteen *louisdors*, nor was he to accuse Madame Goezmann or anyone else. But Dairoles was not equal to the examining judges' astute questions, and he confessed the whole truth. The "Beaumarchais affair" did not look promising for Goezmann. But the situation was not favourable for Beaumarchais either. For the testimony of the witnesses proved that he had actually agreed to spend money in the interests of his case. Now the following questions arose: Did he want Madame Goezmann to arrange a meeting between him and her husband, or did he actually hope that she would prejudice her husband in his favour?

Beaumarchais made good use of the time which elapsed between his first examination, the reading of his case, the study of the records of the proceedings, his confrontation with the other individuals involved, and the cross-questioning to which he was submitted again and again. He established connections with influential men. He always had a fresh incident to tell, and he often repeated the humorous episodes of the case: he described how he had been confronted with Madame Goezmann; with the cleverness of a born detective he had investigated the lives of his adversaries and he revealed what he knew. He was extremely poor. He was fighting for his very existence. It was said that a higher authority had decided that he was to be found guilty and sentenced "to any punishment short of the death penalty."

The knowledge that he would be completely ruined—he would lose his civil liberty, he would be judged, not only as a nobleman, but as a bourgeois—made it easier for him to defend himself. To save himself, he must remain strong. He must act without scruples. The firmest methods were hardly sufficient for this battle. But what methods could he adopt? He had no money. His efforts to derive profits from *The Barber of Seville* had failed. Though the comedy had been definitely accepted, the *Théâtre français* refused to perform a play written by a man who was up for trial. Nor would

any lawyer represent him. No lawyer dared defend him before the new Parliament, and no one dared attack this body, though it was generally hated. To defend Beaumarchais would have meant attacking the Parliament, and would have implied an active opposition to the King who had dictatorially appointed the Parliamentary Councillors.

Beaumarchais was, therefore, his own lawyer. For him this was a new rôle, a new office—and even in this crisis a new opportunity. He studied legal procedure, all the laws applicable to his case. He did not intend to use this new knowledge for his defence, which seemed hopeless. On the contrary, he planned to attack; this was necessary. It was his only means of defence. Beaumarchais took up his old and tried weapon: his pen.

His enemies made his fight easier. Did these blunderers hope to ruin him with the weapon which he himself had mastered? Four memoranda, popularly known as *Mémoires*—written by Madame Goezmann, by Monsieur Marin, by Monsieur Baculard d'Arnot, and by Monsieur Dairolles, who, obviously bribed, had joined Beaumarchais' adversaries—were to enlighten Paris and the Provinces. For public interest in the case had been aroused and people wanted to know more about this impudent adventurer, Beaumarchais, who had been bold enough to attack the honoured Parliament by trying to bribe one of its respected members. The public was to learn that no Parliamentary Councillor, nor the wife of a high judicial official, was corrupt. Only a “miserable poisonous plant in society” could spread such incredible slander.

A few days after the publication of these *Mémoires*, the unemployed standing at the gates of Paris and at the bridges across the Seine, as well as authorised booksellers and street vendors, offered a small pamphlet for sale. This pamphlet was also sent by post to influential persons, ladies and gentlemen at the Court, and the members of the Provincial administration. The pamphlet was entitled: “*Mémoires* to enlighten the public about the accused, Pierre Augustin Caron de

Beaumarchais, Secretary to the King, Lieutenant-General of the Royal Hunt."

This pamphlet was worth the money the purchaser spent for it. The author, not a professional writer, whose two plays had moved the audience of the *Comédie française*, who had pleased some and bored others, was no longer dull. His pamphlet amused everyone, whether he was for or against Beaumarchais; without an effort the reader could imagine the situation of a man forced to carry on a lawsuit. And so that the public would appreciate the main issue, apparently of prime importance in every lawsuit, the writer asked his readers whether it was criminal bribery or merely the pitiable misfortune of the nation that made it necessary to distribute money among the judges in order to be received by them?

The reader was to decide for himself. The "Beaumarchais case" was described as typical of thousands of other cases. Anyone reading the pamphlet was forced to think: "Only a rich man, a man who has influence, can win his case; justice has nothing to do with it." And the public learned that Beaumarchais had called at Goezmann's home twenty-two times, that he had been received only once: when he had paid for his reception. His account of the twenty-two pilgrimages was irresistibly funny, and the frankness with which the author described himself overwhelmed his readers. They did not believe that he had gone to Goezmann's house without hoping to bribe his wife, but it seemed equally probable that Madame Goezmann had intended to accept his offer. People wondered how this trial would end. Would the Parliamentary Councillor and his wife join Beaumarchais in the dock?

A few days after the publication of Beaumarchais' polemic, a new pamphlet appeared. It attacked Beaumarchais violently, the accusations were unrestrained. The entire press was united in its efforts to destroy "this dangerous creature."

Beaumarchais sat at his desk responding to these vituperations as though they did not concern him. He described the scene when he

had been confronted with Madame Goezmann, her uncontrolled anger, his own chivalrous behaviour. The women whom he had known and conquered, women in general, were not to think him cowardly and uncouth, a man who hoped to succeed merely by offering money. On the contrary: they were to think of him as a chivalrous man, who was courteous towards this antagonistic woman, a man who paid court to women even when his life was at stake.

He was always polite to Madame Goezmann. True, his courtesy was devastating, for the dramatist showed her up in the questions and answers which arose when they were confronted. The reader could not help thinking her a silly, awkward, and really terrible woman, who, driven into a corner again and again by his clever flattery, lost her self-control and contradicted herself.

His exaggerated chivalrousness towards Madame Goezmann was nothing but a move in the game. Beaumarchais did not treat the men in the case gently; he was pitiless in his ridicule of them. He conducted his readers into the "Armoury of human baseness"; they were to see what these enemies, who had brought him to trial before the new Parliament, were really like. It was obvious how little the opinion of his adversaries was worth. His character drawings were excellent. Writers, who now considered him one of themselves, philosophers, who acknowledged his ability, and his aristocratic patrons urged him to write a play based on his pamphlets. They said that it contained a social comedy stronger and more real than any of Molière's works.

Before Beaumarchais had agreed, he heard that the Dubarry had anticipated his intentions. The Countess was not concerned with the fact that she was responsible for the fall of the old and the appointment of the new Parliament attacked in his pamphlets. This girl of the streets was amused by Beaumarchais' popular humour. Political considerations ceased to exist. She followed Louis XV's example, and concentrated on her personal pleasures.

She gave instructions that some of the scenes from his pamphlet were to be dramatised for her private theatre.

A marital quarrel almost resulted from the pamphlet in the Dauphin's household. Young Marie Antoinette, who usually hated everything the Dubarry liked, was enthusiastic about Beaumarchais' *Mémoire*. Her husband, however, took the pamphlets away from her, and flung them into the open fire. Did this man, as a rule so lacking in intuition, feel that these pamphlets might eventually have disastrous consequences for himself?

Beaumarchais was the centre of popular interest. His pamphlets brought in money, he was no longer in want. He breathed more freely. He could not expect to win his case, but whenever he was attacked he at once recognised the weaknesses of his enemies' polemics, and he was ready to write another *Mémoire* himself. Then he would exclaim with pleasure: "Another enemy, a few more polemical pamphlets, and I shall be as white as snow." He was reproached for his journey to Spain, and accused of immoral intentions while he was in Madrid. He replied by so perfect an account of his meeting with Clavigo that a young lawyer, Johann Wolfgang Goethe, who was then twenty-five, began to dramatise Beaumarchais' *Mémoire* the evening he received it. In this pamphlet about Clavigo Beaumarchais had reached the height of his powers.

Thousands of copies were printed, people learned this *Mémoire* by heart, some of the scenes were acted in the homes of the bourgeoisie, and Beaumarchais was more popular than Voltaire had been. The fifteen *louisdors*, the original reason for this case, were used in a slogan: "Louis XV destroyed the old Parliament; fifteen *louisdors* will destroy the new one." People jested about the new Parliament, "which had not taken root, but was now reaching out with both hands." It was believed that Monsieur and Madame Goezmann had been bribed, though they fiercely attacked Beaumarchais in their pamphlets. Everything they said was ponderous; his answers were light and amusing. He gaily enlightened

the public about his enemies' lives, which he described in witty commentaries. People enjoyed laughing, enjoyed sharing the irony of this admirable and clever gladiator who would perish in his struggle against the despotic power of the State. People forgot that he was fighting for himself ; they thought he was fighting for them all. He was no longer ostracised or despised, no one avoided him, his friendship was prized. Princely mansions were opened to him. His carriage and his horses had been seized, but carriages with crowns on their doors were at his disposal. He was the hero of the Nation.

His pamphlets contained a "human comedy," and the man who wrote them was gay and free, and everyone was charmed by him. But curiously enough he was not attracted by a frivolous life. He had forgotten Madame Mesnard and her gay circle of friends. A serious and dependable woman, who had originally come to see him as she wanted to meet the author of the *Mémoires*, because her motherly instincts made her feel he was in trouble, had become his mistress.

Gudin was present at their first meeting. "It was difficult," he wrote, "to see Beaumarchais and not to love him. The charm of his personality seemed to have increased now that all of Paris was proclaiming him as the defender and the revenger of the old Parliament."

The day of the trial approached. Beaumarchais had no illusions. A short time before his *Mémoires* had been forbidden. The authorities had taken this step when it was too late. Citoyen Beaumarchais had called the nation to be his witness, and had appointed it as the judge in this case, which demonstrated the abuses practised by the Court. He had described his case as typical, and had thus made it the concern of every bourgeois.

His patron, Prince de Conti, said to him the day before the trial : "Do not go to the *Palais de Justice* to-morrow. I am trembling for you. If the rumours I hear are true, if you are convicted, you will be taken to prison directly from the Court."

But Beaumarchais went to the Court early, at five o'clock in the morning. He stood before the gate decorated in gold, before the gate with the *fleur de lis* design, where he had watched the procession as a boy: the arrival of the carriages, the proud walk of the men wearing their robes of office. "All my friends, all my fellow-citizens are still asleep, while I may be facing death and disgrace; this great city is asleep, while I may never be at rest again."

He did not betray his presentiment, which he did not describe until later, to his judges. He was questioned and he answered quietly. Then he left for his sister Miron's home, which was near. Here he fell into a deathlike sleep. When he was awakened to hear the verdict, he listened calmly when he was told that he had been convicted, that he would be deprived of his civil liberty, and that he would be obliged to hear the pronouncement of his sentence kneeling. He learned that this was really a victory, however, for Madame Goezmann had been sentenced to the same penalty and her husband had been placed *hors de cours*, that is to say, he had been dismissed from his office.

The judicial authorities whose duty it was to conduct Beaumarchais to the Court for the painful ceremony of pronouncing his sentence, did not find him. The King's first Chamberlain, Monsieur de Laborde, a wealthy courtier and a gifted musician, had hidden this man, condemned in the name of the King, in the Royal Wardrobes. The next evening a Bourbon, Prince de Conti, gave a reception in honour of Pierre Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais, who had been sentenced, and the great world of Paris attended. Monsieur de Sartines, the Minister of Police, soon found it necessary to curtail Beaumarchais' popularity, which was obviously directed against the Government. Laughingly he said to the Parisians' new favourite: "It is not enough to be *blâmé*; to be in disgrace, a man must remain modest as well."

CHAPTER III

SHORTLY after the Beaumarchais case had been settled—and his sentence, by the way, was never formally pronounced—Monsieur de Sartines was summoned to the Comtesse Dubarry. She received him *en négligé*, sitting at her famous porcelain desk. He saw by her face that she was worried. As Fouché's predecessor was her confidant and the trusted friend of her enemies as well, he was surprised not to know the cause of her anxiety before she knew it herself. Had *Mesdames*, led by Princess Adelaide, who was temperamental despite her forty years, had their niece, the Dauphine Marie Antoinette, or had Choiseul and his followers intrigued against the favourite they hated without telling him about it? As the Minister of Police wanted to stay in office after the death of Louis XV, he consistently tried to make himself indispensable to his future sovereign and his friends. The King was over seventy, but his health was excellent. The Comtesse Dubarry had always been surprisingly frank about this subject with Monsieur de Sartines. Did her sad face mean that the monarch's vigour was impaired? Was she afraid that her position was endangered? It was hard to imagine what would happen if this was so—a new Cabinet and perhaps the re-establishment of the old Parliament? The contrast in the significance of cause and effect made him smile. It was a troublesome task to be Police Minister of France.

Monsieur de Sartines was less agitated. His surmises had been wrong. Something unexpected had occurred. The Comtesse Dubarry had received a letter from London. Monsieur Théveneau de Morande, a Frenchman who had belonged to the *demi-monde* in Paris until it became impossible for him to remain there, wrote to tell his former mistress that he would soon publish a book. The documents in the appendix would prove that *The Secret Memoirs of a Prostitute* were not the author's invention. Nor was it a pamphlet

which would be discredited because it was too prejudiced. On the contrary, it was an objective account of real facts.

This news was a heavy blow for the Comtesse Dubarry. She was considering a dissolution of her sham marriage with the Comte Dubarry. . . . She did not discuss her hopes with anyone, but it was known that, like the Marquise de Pompadour, she had contemplated the good fortune of Madame de Maintenon. Madame Dubarry hoped that she, too, would secure her position by at least a morganatic marriage with the King. Monsieur de Sartines had suppressed the satirical songs and pamphlets which had been circulated in Paris about her, but not until they had been memorised by her enemies. She, by the way, had never been particularly concerned about public opinion. But her new ambition had made her very sensitive about her virtue. She believed that her plan would fail if the tales about her indiscreet youth were revived.

Whenever the Comtesse Dubarry did not want to confide in the King, she discussed her troubles with Monsieur de Sartines. She implored him to protect her against Morande. If he could not silence this creature, the disgrace of her past, circulated in thousands of copies, would be known to the world. The Minister of Police promised to help her, and he meant what he said, not so much because he wanted to be of service to her, as because he considered it inexpedient to have the King of France proclaimed as the lover of a former prostitute. He instructed his most efficient assistant to deal with this case.

Monsieur de Sartines' reports to the Dubarry were discouraging. The Ministry of Police had tried to silence Morande by diplomatic means, but the English Government's answer had been "incredibly broad-minded," as Sartines said to Madame Dubarry, and the English would not intervene. The English Government admitted that Morande's intentions were disgusting, but his person, according to English law, was inviolable. It would be impossible to deport him. Sartines had sent agents to London with instructions to

use force if necessary to seize the manuscript or this dangerous man. When, however, these agents chased Morande "like a runaway dog," the London crowd, which hated despotic methods, threw them into the Thames. Since this assault Morande refused to negotiate with Madame Dubarry's representatives. He would not even discuss a bribe. Monsieur de Sartines told the Countess that he did not know what to do.

When he came to see her again, he had one last suggestion to offer. Morande refused to receive an official representative, but he might be willing to see someone whom he trusted, someone who was an outlaw like himself. Such a person might persuade him to destroy his libellous manuscript.

"If the *Marseillaise* had already been written and set to music, and a man as popular as Beaumarchais had called the population 'to arms,' all of Paris would have followed him." But while an agitated crowd, ready to rebel, was looking for him in the park of the *Palais Royal*, in the theatre lobbies, and the popular cafés, he did not appear. Apart from Monsieur Laborde, and a few others, including Monsieur de Sartines, no one knew where he was hiding.

A few weeks later Beaumarchais himself believed—a living example seemed to make this clear to him—that he had missed the first great opportunity of his life. He comforted himself with the doubtful maxim that a popular revolt is never made by one man, but that, on the contrary, a man can be made by such a revolt. This philosophical thought merely concealed his disappointment. Paris had expected an entirely different development from him; the rebel had not become a revolutionary, he had not joined the "Third Estate." Instead he had sought refuge among the aristocracy.

In his first interview with the Minister of Police, he had submitted to Sartines' wish, laughingly expressed, that he withdrew from the acclamation of the people. He was not only *blâmé*—he had become modest as well. Only if he obeyed was there a hope that his appeal against his conviction might be successful. He had

promised that he would not publish any more *Mémoires* in the coming months.

Monsieur de Sartines knew about Beaumarchais' past, and he had not needed the police records to get this information. "The *Mémoires* against Monsieur Pierre Augustin Caron" had not omitted the most trivial detail. This man, who obviously wanted, above all, to live in luxury, did not seem capable of renunciation. He had been a watchmaker's son, an actor, a vagabond, and a public performer; he owed his first office at Court to a love-affair; he was a parasite living on the rich; Duverney's secret agent; he had been an adventurer in Madrid. He was a schemer and a writer, and it was said that he employed others to write his works (in reply to this accusation he asked why his adversaries had not employed equally proficient writers). Sartines did not believe that this luxury-loving creature would be dangerous unless he was attacked—and fighting desperately.

When he talked to Sartines, Beaumarchais did not immediately agree to negotiate with Morande, the pamphleteer. Had he sunk so low, he asked, that Morande would consider him his equal? He must go, Sartines declared, a man who was in disgrace, a *blâmé*, must, in order to live, work behind the scenes of society; he must act as a spy, a secret agent.

Beaumarchais soon learned that public sympathy and enthusiasm for a man merely because he is *blâmé*, a man who has sworn to be silent and not to encourage his own popularity, is shortlived. The popularity he had enjoyed was soon over; he was now only a man in disgrace. Though Parliament was despised, he was nevertheless looked down upon because he had been convicted by this body. Soon the friends who had applauded him so warmly that first evening were embarrassed when they met him. Prince de Conti asked him to use the back stairs in his Palace. Though from them he was then conducted to the Prince's drawing-room, Beaumarchais was depressed by the gloomy staircase. He did not betray the fact that



THE COUNTESS DUBARRY

Engraving by Beauvarlet after a painting by Drouais

his contempt for his host's guests was becoming violent and bitter. These men were privileged by birth: they had only to be born to occupy an important position in life. Figaro, the hero of his famous comedy, was beginning to take shape in his mind. He saw the effect of this play as in a vision.

When, at the splendid first night of the *Marriage of Figaro*, the ladies and gentlemen of the French aristocracy wondered whether their hearty laughter might not disarrange their costly wigs, they had no idea that Figaro's exclamation would one day cost them their heads. "You made the effort to be born, and that is all you have ever done."

Despite the fact that he did whatever he could to win back his former position in society, Beaumarchais contributed more to the French Revolution than he would have done had he organised a revolt in 1774. For he wrote. His song about the "accident of birth," which shook the aristocracy with laughter, became the fanfare of the Revolution.

Beaumarchais despised humanity while he wrote his *Figaro*. He remembered the well-known dictum of Louis XV: "No decent man can stand the life at my Court." Should he be humbled by the dishonourable courtiers—whose lack of character had been recognised by their own King—or should he be a sycophant and rise again in the world, so that he could again wear his robes of office, drive to Court in his own carriage, receive his guests in his own drawing-room, cease being a poor man, and be once more a wealthy gentleman? He asked for an audience with Monsieur de Sartines. For this interview he wore his gold-braided coat; he carried his hat adorned with galloon under his arm; his sword was at his side. He appeared as a perfect gentleman who had come to tell the minister on what conditions he would agree to his suggestions. He was being asked to perform an ignominious service, but his manner implied that it was a dignified duty which any courtier would have undertaken. Above all, he told Monsieur de Sartines, he must

talk to Madame Dubarry personally, and a short interview with the King would be very encouraging to him. Apart from this, he demanded a repeal of his conviction and the restitution of his honourable positions. Finally, he asked for money. "Money above all, for the price of *every*thing is money."

This quick-change artist had again completely changed; he had altered from his spirit to his mind, from head to foot. A journey abroad tempted him. In his youth good had come to him from London. The mission, which a little while before had seemed insulting, now appealed to him.

Madame Dubarry, in her letters, mentions her interview with Beaumarchais. She was shy in his presence, "but this gifted diplomat was courteous; when he referred to my past, he chose his words carefully. I showed him Morande's letter, and explained that I would agree to anything he could do to help me. . . . As I realised that Beaumarchais wanted the favour of the King's smile, I arranged for Louis XV to receive him."

This man who had been convicted by the Parliament, unconstitutionally appointed by the King, who had been sentenced by the highest judicial body in the monarchy, was now graciously received by the King ! "Honour and justice ceased to exist if this pleased Louis XV or the desires of his mistress."

When, on his journey from Paris to London, the gentleman, who was growing a little stout, was asked for his papers, he put his hand in his right breast pocket and identified himself as Monsieur de Ronac. No one thought of separating the letters in this name and of putting them together again so that they made the name Caron. He had chosen this pseudonym for Morande's benefit, and he acted the part of an outlaw deprived of his civil rights. Monsieur de Beaumarchais, well dressed as usual, had however notified Lord Rochford, the former Ambassador to Spain whom he

had known in Madrid, that he was coming. Rochford was now Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs in London. Pierre Augustin had adopted two rôles for his visit to England. He had created the one to convince Morande that he was afraid to use his own name, the other to revive Lord Rochford's friendship for him.

He could not help comparing London with Madrid. He decided that London would be more difficult to conquer. He could not speak English—his drama *Eugénie* had been translated into that language. The strange mode of life in England intimidated him. The difference was more than superficial. He was surprised by what he learned during his first week in London. No one could be arrested or imprisoned unless a judicially sound sentence had been passed. The English judges were said to be absolutely honourable, but even their judgments were not accepted until a jury of twelve citizens had declared the accused to be guilty. Beaumarchais would not have been sentenced in England, he would not have been unjustly imprisoned. Montesquieu had been right when he said: “Even if an Englishman has as many enemies as he has hairs on his head, nothing can happen to him.” In England men were citizens as well as “subjects.” The “accident of birth” had ceased to be omnipotent. Free citizens and free tenants elected the five hundred and eighty members of the House of Commons to represent them.

Events, which seemed inconceivable to a Frenchman, actually happened here. Shortly before Beaumarchais' arrival, Mr. Wilkes had been elected Lord Mayor of London. Beaumarchais heard, to his surprise, that this man had been elected in three successive years by the citizens of London, and that three times the King of England had refused to recognise him as the Mayor. Wilkes had therefore been unable to take office. Finally, however, by an overwhelming majority in the elections—for the population was unquestioningly loyal to Wilkes—he had succeeded in taking this office which was constitutionally his.

This made a tremendous impression on Beaumarchais. Was he

not as popular in Paris as Wilkes was in London ? A powerful opposition had finally made Wilkes Lord Mayor of London, while he, in disgrace as he was, had been sent to negotiate with a criminal as an equal. Was this his fault ? Were the French people responsible ? In France the will of one privileged class was law, and he had learned by experience how disloyal this class was. Yet he had not been strong enough to emancipate himself from it, because he had adopted their aristocratic mode of life. As he had been unable fully to exploit his heroic opportunity, he must at least try to reinstate his honour and recapture his wealth.

He suddenly wondered whether Morande had included in his pamphlet all the known anecdotes about Madame Dubarry and the King. Would he be oppressing a silly polemic or a masterpiece ? He imagined how he himself would write such a pamphlet. During the last few months he had done nothing but defend himself against his enemies ; he had studied their pasts to learn where they were vulnerable. Perhaps Morande, who was, after all, not writing this pamphlet merely in self-defence, was not as contemptible as he was said to be. Perhaps, though he wanted to make money out of his knowledge of the Court, he was, in a higher sense, a justified critic, a useful member of the new order, which was obviously declaring war on the old system of society. And was it entirely wrong for him to accept money for his pamphlet ? How should he live ? How could an outlaw live ? Only by making money outside the circle which had ostracised him. Beaumarchais knew this from his own experience. As a fellow-sufferer he was sympathetic towards Morande.

He was impressed, too, by Lord Rochford's integrity, by the absolute honesty of every word he uttered, by his loyalty to an old friend. Rochford had welcomed him as though no one in London knew about his trial, which, as a matter of fact, had been a world sensation. Rochford pretended to remember only the conversationalist, the man who was so well informed, the musician and poet

whom he had met in Madrid. He did not neglect to mention that he had seen the English version of *Eugénie*, that he had been proud to have known, to have been a friend of the talented author. When Beaumarchais, hoping to anticipate less friendly accounts of his case, told Rochford why he had been sentenced so shamefully, Rochford assured him that he would help him in every way he could.

If Beaumarchais had mentioned what had actually brought him to London, their friendship would, of course, have been over. But Rochford's fashionable French visitor did not resemble the shabby individual who knocked at Morande's door. It was not opened at once. The pamphleteer was afraid of a second assault. Who was Monsieur Ronac? He would not receive him until he had seen a letter signed by the famous, notorious, and real Monsieur de Beaumarchais.

They understood each other chiefly because they were both outlaws. By temperament, however, they were widely apart. Writing was extremely difficult for Morande, a means to financial gains or to blackmail; while Beaumarchais wrote for pleasure, this was his only way of communicating his exuberant imagination and vitality to the world about him. Morande wrote to make money, while for Beaumarchais, on the contrary, writing was a rest from his efforts to amass a fortune.

It was easy for Beaumarchais, who was a stronger personality than Morande, to get from him a copy of the pamphlet. Morande even promised that he would not publish it if a suitable sum were promised him, not by the King of France, but by Beaumarchais. The scoundrel had more faith in a fellow-scoundrel than in the King, for Beaumarchais had emphasised his questionable past. He did not dislike this rôle of an adventurer, for the "secret agent" was acting his favourite character—"Figaro here—Figaro there." He played this part eagerly, he always enjoyed a new rôle.

Back to Paris. Not in a comfortable old-fashioned coach this

time. Instead he galloped home, changing horses at every relay station. Beaumarchais' success was assured. The pamphlet was more libellous than he had expected. He alone would be able to suppress it.

The King himself received the copy of the pamphlet. He was royally amused by his mistress's past. Had she had almost as many love-affairs as he had had himself? In this at least she was his equal, but he was not particularly anxious for the public to know about this equality. He gave instructions that Beaumarchais was to return to London to prevent the publication of the pamphlet and to destroy it.

Morande's welcome to Beaumarchais was friendly. The pamphleteer's suspicion was not aroused when Beaumarchais returned from the French Court with plenty of money. Convinced that he was dealing with a real scoundrel, he confided in Beaumarchais. He was a blackmailer by profession. Sometimes it was not necessary for him to write; a printed title-page often frightened a person whose reputation was endangered. Beaumarchais seemed to understand blackmail. Morande had not expected such huge sums: thirty-two thousand *livres* in cash and a pension. Then Beaumarchais advised Morande to "give up his blackmailing pamphlets altogether." He was to reform and, more than that, he was henceforth to adopt the opposite point of view. Instead of attacking Louis XV, Morande was actively to support Louis XV and Madame Dubarry. He was to see that no printer in London published a pamphlet against the King or his mistress.

Beaumarchais' success was greater still. In principle, Lord Rochford agreed that no Frenchman resident in England should be allowed to write against the French Government. Complete success. Beaumarchais' rehabilitation seemed assured. Madame Dubarry would be his friend, and he would therefore be in favour with the King. At last Beaumarchais' career was assured, he would rise in the world. This secret errand would be followed by public

missions. He wanted to be a diplomat. Why should he not be a Minister or an Ambassador? After all, he had accomplished the impossible; he knew every phase of the life at Court, and he already saw himself in important positions of State. He would discard the robes of a Lieutenant-General of the Royal Hunts, he would be a diplomat wearing a blue ribbon.

The crossing to Boulogne was stormy. When Beaumarchais arrived he felt that the mood of the population had changed. A new era had begun. Louis XV was dying. He had contracted this fatal illness during a casual love-affair with a gardener's daughter.

Two human beings in France fervently wished that the King would recover, or that he would at least live a few days longer: Madame Dubarry and Beaumarchais. The Countess hoped to rescue her fortune and safeguard her liberty; Beaumarchais wanted the King to express his gratitude for his successful mission. He hurried to Versailles. When he arrived the gentlemen ushers were already calling out of the windows: "The King is dead, long live the King!"

Beaumarchais was too crushed to make plans for the future. But he retained enough vitality to write to a friend: "Most men would hang themselves after such a blow had been inflicted on them by destiny."

The old King was dead, the young King was alive. Since the death of his father, *Mesdames'* brother, the Dauphin, had puzzled the entire Court. Unexpectedly this awkward young man, who was exceedingly modest, had become the centre of attention. He himself was not yet prepared for this position of prominence. Everyone wondered what he was really like—no one realised that he might actually be what he appeared to be. He was an enigma because he was not affected, because he was natural. Could a King of France be so innocent, so dull, so timid; could he be so little concerned with

the traditions of luxury and pleasure which had prevailed at the Louvre; could he be so indifferent to women? Louis XVI had only two passions—hunting, and the crude and yet delicate locksmith's trade. Never before had the Court been confronted by so puzzling a question: "What will be the new monarch's attitude; what will he do?"

The population of Paris only knew that the young Queen, this Austrian Archduchess, was very pretty and very modest. She had never done anything to make herself unpopular. Her obvious disapproval of Madame Dubarry had made the Countess's enemies like her, and almost the entire population disliked the Dubarry. Marie Antoinette's antipathy towards Madame Dubarry had not wavered, though her mother, the Empress Maria Theresa, had urged her to be more tolerant, and the King had tried to win her favour for the Countess. The people were pleased because the first lady of the Court was gay and loved diversions, but they harboured one resentment: that she was not yet a mother.

Beaumarchais was prejudiced in her favour, because he had heard that she enjoyed his *Mémoires*, and that she had quoted some of the witty passages. As Louis XV's death had shattered his hopes for a career, he now hoped, if no other way was possible, to be reinstated at Court by attracting Marie Antoinette's attention, and after that gaining her support. But how could he, an outlaw not eligible for an office of State, who was forced to spend his life in the secret darkness of oblivion, make the new sun shining in Versailles take any notice of him?

Each question brought the same answer. First he must be reinstated. At forty-two his situation was less promising than it had been at the very beginning of his career. He was famous, but he was notorious as well. In any case he was considered a suspicious character. This could not be helped, though after his return Prince Conti had again received him with his other guests as though nothing had happened. Perhaps he would be able to consolidate

his position if he, too, pretended that nothing unusual had occurred. But he had no money to carry out his plans.

The heavy costs involved in his journey to London had not been paid back to him. He had lived on borrowed money. The Minister of Police, who could at least have refunded his expenses, did not wish to include a large sum in his accounts, for this item might have reminded the new Government that he had been on friendly terms with the late King's mistress. She had now been banished. Morande, too, was not being paid for his services in London. Monsieur de Sartines did, however, suggest to Beaumarchais that he might be able to present an account to Louis XVI for the money Beaumarchais had actually spent, and for an added sum as well. He assured Beaumarchais that this would be possible as soon as some new case had arisen, as soon as another pamphlet—naturally not dealing with former conditions at the Court—had to be suppressed. Was that a hint of destiny, a hint from above? His old father and his sister Julie longed to return to the house in the rue de Condé, but Beaumarchais was burdened with his debt to the Comte de la Blache, and *The Barber of Seville* had not been accepted by a theatre. Beaumarchais longed to see this happy personification of himself, freed from his everyday life, on the stage. He considered Sartines' suggestion, that money would be forthcoming if he suppressed another pamphlet.

In Spain he had often heard that the Spanish line of the Bourbons could have put forward claims to the French throne if they declared Louis XIV's treaties after the Wars of the Spanish Succession to be null and void. These claims were really an illusion, but Louis XV had made himself so unpopular with his subjects that the French people might perhaps have preferred the Spanish line of the Bourbons. Forced to overcome great dangers in a foreign country, these Spanish Bourbons had developed into more hardy and reliable monarchs than the degenerate successors of Louis XIV. This was an hypothesis and nothing more, but the King would surely wish to

suppress a pamphlet entitled *A suggestion for the Spanish Line*. Such a pamphlet would discuss the young King of France's married life; it would point out that he was impotent, that the Queen was therefore unhappy, and that perhaps this state of affairs was dangerous, especially as the nation was in an irritated mood. Could anyone dare, however, to express the extremely improbable suggestion that the Queen wanted to foist a child not her own on the people, or that to conceive the future heir to the throne of France she would commit adultery ?

A few days after Sartines had refused to pay Beaumarchais for his journey to London, he came to see the Minister of Police. Beaumarchais told him, a frightened look on his face, that a terrible pamphlet about the King's impotence and the Queen's adulterous intentions had been written, that it had already been printed, and that it would appear simultaneously in London and in Amsterdam. It would not be an easy task to stop the distribution of this disgusting pamphlet. For the publisher, Beaumarchais told Sartines, was a wealthy Jew, who would not be satisfied with a small sum. He suggested that Monsieur de Sartines send a clever agent to London to suppress the pamphlet.

It is difficult to say whether the Minister of Police realised that this was a hoax, whether perhaps he welcomed an opportunity—though none really existed—to show the young King how active he was, and how efficiently the police organisation was functioning. The fact remains that Monsieur de Sartines informed Louis XVI, and that he recommended Beaumarchais as the most suitable man to suppress this pamphlet. The King agreed, though he refused to entrust a written order to this secret agent. Nevertheless, Beaumarchais was ready to leave at once, for, so he told Monsieur de Sartines, four thousand copies had been printed, and he wanted to stop their circulation.

When Beaumarchais took leave of Conti, the Prince urgently asked him to remain in Paris a few more days to see a play which

was to be given in the Prince's private theatre. He consented unwillingly. He was concentrating on his future, and he had little time to think about new works of literature. He did not admire Marsollier, the author, whose play was to be produced, and he did not think that it would be particularly interesting. At any rate, no play could possibly compensate him for the time he would lose: every hour which separated him from action was irksome.

When the curtain was raised Beaumarchais noticed that the Prince's guests were looking at him and not at the stage. Programmes had not been distributed, and he had only half heard the name of the play. But when the actor playing the rôle of Monsieur Norac appeared on the stage and the audience shouted "Beaumarchais" with enthusiasm, he realised that Norac was the backward spelling of his bourgeois name. The actor in the opposite rôle was Javolci—Clavigo. Beaumarchais himself was on the stage. Was his own destiny, which roused so much curiosity, to be described again? Would they not leave him alone; were they tormenting him with yesterday while he was chasing the morrow? He was irritated when he realised that the play was a dramatisation of his last *Mémoire*, the one describing his meeting with Clavigo. But soon he was more cheerful. The play was enthusiastically received, "everyone present applauded me so warmly that my own memories and this distinction made me weep."

From London Beaumarchais wrote repeatedly to Sartines requesting a document, signed by the King, showing that he was duly accredited. He could not possibly approach Lord Rochford as a private individual, he said, and ask for his help. He must have a letter signed by the King. Without it he could not succeed. He made Sartines' life a hell. Beaumarchais pointed out that if the pamphlet appeared, Marie Antoinette would never forgive Sartines.

Besides, the King's signature would save God knows how many guineas.

In another letter he wrote that he had seen Lord Rochford, but that this well-bred Englishman had considered his mission undignified, a breach between them had almost occurred. And Sartines must realise, Beaumarchais emphasised, that he could do nothing in England without Lord Rochford's support. How could he be of use to the French secret service in London? How could he possibly achieve any outstanding results? Lord Rochford would only help him if he knew that the King of France was personally interested in this mission.

A few days later Beaumarchais held a document in his hand. It said: "Monsieur de Beaumarchais, my secret representative, will travel as quickly as possible to the place of his mission. The discretion and the energy with which he fulfils his task will be the best proof of his devotion to my service." It was signed: "Louis." There was no doubt that the signature was genuine. Beaumarchais' letter of thanks to Sartines reflected his appreciation of this document.

It was valuable from two points of view. In the first place, it would increase his prestige. Beaumarchais could show it to Lord Rochford, to whom, of course, he had never mentioned his secret mission. For obviously Rochford would have had nothing to do with it, whether Beaumarchais had been an official or an unofficial agent. With this document, furthermore, Beaumarchais could prove that he was again an important personage at the French Court. His reputation, so this document would indicate, had been unjustly ruined by evil intrigues against him. Now, however, by the grace of his King, he had been completely exonerated. The English Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs would undoubtedly be glad to negotiate secretly with a neighbouring Power through a friend.

Beaumarchais himself determined the material value of the royal letter. It would earn for him large sums. The one could be had

if he adopted the following method: he must wait a few days, and then sit down at his desk and report that he had confronted the author and publisher of the pamphlet, and that he had persuaded them that it would be more profitable and more honourable to destroy it. He would write that he had shown them that their pamphlet would ruin an innocent Queen who was loved by her people. His report and his descriptions of the scenes must be convincing, and his own efficiency must be suitably emphasised.

The Minister of Police would not be surprised that it had cost four hundred guineas to persuade the Jew, who was very rich, to destroy the copies which were in London. Besides, it was not cheap to burn four thousand copies in a lime-pit near the Oxford Road.

Then, so Beaumarchais wrote, he was going to Amsterdam. It would not be simple, or inexpensive, to induce a man to hand over a manuscript which had taken him God knows how long to write.

Arduous tasks must be well rewarded. Beaumarchais, it is true, was following Morande's example, but he was more than a mere imitator. He wrote to Sartines that he did not need money; he desired only the vindication of his honour, his reappointment to his public offices, and nothing else. "I am like a lion; I am prepared to sell my diamonds, all my jewellery in order to serve the young King and Queen." He did not intend to earn the second sum, to be made out of Louis XVI's signature, in France. A new idea had occurred to him.

Soon, so he records, an incident forced him to prove his willingness to sacrifice himself. He sold his last possessions. The criminal publisher had escaped him in Amsterdam, and had gone to Nürnberg to carry out his disgraceful trade. Beaumarchais must pursue him.

Monsieur de Sartines had reason to be satisfied with the zeal of his secret agent. The pamphlet would not appear in London or Amsterdam, and if Beaumarchais caught the Jew in Nürnberg, it would be suppressed in Germany as well. In his imagination,

Monsieur de Sartines followed his representative on this journey. Beaumarchais sent him a message from almost every large city through which he travelled. This cat-and-mouse game between the pursuer and the pursued, who could not escape in the end, was exciting to watch. Sartines was thrilled when he read Beaumarchais' stirring reports of his journey, and he wondered whether this cunning Jew might not yet elude Beaumarchais.

Monsieur de Sartines was more agitated still when he heard from Nürnberg that his representative had been assaulted and wounded by the man he had been pursuing. This had happened in a forest near the city, but—thank God—the brave pursuer had overpowered the Jew. Beaumarchais had seized the manuscript and he was on his way to Vienna.

The Minister of Police was puzzled by this journey to Vienna. Now that Beaumarchais had the manuscript in his possession, he should have returned to Paris. What was he doing in Vienna? What did he want to achieve there? Monsieur de Sartines wondered whether he should warn the Ambassador at the Imperial Court in Vienna. But how could he disavow his own actions, how could he direct suspicion towards a man whom he himself had supplied with a signed document from the King? Sartines knew nothing definite, but he was vaguely uneasy. He decided that the only thing he could do was to wait. He must await Beaumarchais' letters and show them to the King or mention them casually in the daily police reports, so that His Majesty would see that the Minister of Police was conscientious, that he was neglecting nothing in his constant efforts to protect the good name of the royal family.

CHAPTER IV

BEAUMARCAIS was not aware of Maria Theresa's motherly anxiety, of her intuitive fear for her daughter's future. He did not know that this Empress, who in her youth had valiantly defended her throne, who had waged wars—to become a great Empress in times of peace—had one serious anxiety: Marie Antoinette. The letters from this troubled mother, which Comte Mercy, the Austrian Ambassador, gave the young Queen in secret, were not made known until later. None of Maria Theresa's contemporaries understood her overwhelming maternal feelings. She had arranged a foreign marriage for her daughter, and princesses were the great support of international politics. Maria Theresa was like all mothers who are ruling Queens—she realised that she was sacrificing her daughter, but she had sent her to the French Court to end the dissension, which had separated the houses of Bourbon and Habsburg for centuries, and to consummate the new alliance by a marriage.

If Marie Antoinette had become a mother, if Maria Theresa had been able to hope that her own grandson would one day rule over France, she would have felt that she had done her duty. Instead of good news she received reports the truth of which she could not doubt. The King was a man and yet he was not a man. Marie Antoinette was his wife and yet not his wife. Maria Theresa always acknowledged the natural facts of life; she asked her physician van Swieten's advice about her relations with her husband, the Holy Roman Emperor of Germany. And she never concealed from herself that nothing could be more harmful for a woman than to be with a man and yet not be with him.

True, she was judging the situation from her own point of view, and her own strong nature was unlike that of her delicate daughter. She herself would have revolted against her daughter's destiny,

and she was afraid that Marie Antoinette would rebel. She was surprised when the young woman, made irritable by her marriage, found an escape in coquetry, which in turn increased her irritability and soon plunged the entire Court into a state of nervous excitement.

On the twentieth of August, 1774, Maria Theresa received a letter from a French aristocrat. He wrote that he had been travelling day and night from the West to bring her news which would affect her own happiness and her peace of mind. He said that "she would be profoundly moved" by what he had to tell her, and the Empress at once agreed to grant Monsieur de Ronac a private audience. True, she must first learn through a trusted courtier what this Frenchman wanted. For she was not only a mother who would receive anyone at once who brought her news of her unfortunate daughter—she knew instinctively that the writer of the letter had referred to Marie Antoinette—she was also an Empress who could not unceremoniously see every stranger who claimed that he had a mysterious message for her. Besides, as a rule, these messages turned out to be quite unimportant. The Governor of Lower Austria, Count Seilern, was Maria Theresa's confidant on this occasion. Seilern sent his secretary to fetch the Frenchman.

Was this a success? Beaumarchais wondered. He realised that he must proceed cautiously. Above all, he must see the Empress. Under no circumstances would it be wise to confide in the Count. In order to emphasise his zeal, his willingness to sacrifice himself, he told the Governor's secretary that, as the result of an attack made on him, he suffered from haemorrhages of the stomach. Where had he been assaulted? Near Nürnberg. Nevertheless, duty is duty, and he would be with the Count within the hour.

He had a pleasant view from his room in the *Drei Lauffern* Inn in the *Michaelerplatz*. Opposite his window was the small Court theatre. (Beaumarchais wondered whether *The Barber of Seville* and his comedy *The Marriage of Figaro*, which he had already com-

pleted in his mind, would ever be acted there. He wondered whether his plays would be translated into German as they had been into English.) He leaned out of the window and looked across at the *Hofburg*, which seemed gloomy and unfriendly, and yet dignified in its structure. The simplicity of this building contrasted with the magnificence of French palaces. The whole city was less ornate than Paris, but Beaumarchais liked it.

In an hour Monsieur de Ronac walked in measured steps to the official residence of the Governor, which was near the inn. He was conspicuously well dressed. His lace jabot was perfect; he carried a small red leather stick; his sword hung at his side. He wore a huge wig, beautifully set, and the servant, who accompanied him, walked at the proper distance behind him. He carefully carried his arm in a sling; for he planned to give a detailed account of his injuries. The wound in his face, which had been less serious, was beginning to heal. It was not quite easy to make himself interesting.

Beaumarchais was admitted at once. The audience was brief. Count Seilern asked Monsieur de Ronac why he wished to see the Empress in a private audience. Beaumarchais bowed with dignity, and explained that he had been in England and Holland on a mission for the King of France, and that it had now become necessary for him to go to Germany as well. He casually mentioned that he was travelling under an assumed name, that he was Beaumarchais, but that he was so famous that he had feared he might be recognised at any time. His mission was secret, he continued. Then with a fine gesture Beaumarchais raised his jabot and took out a round golden case which he handed to the Count. The case contained his authorisation from the King of France.

He was a representative of the Empress's son-in-law? Family feeling had always been strong in Vienna, especially when the Imperial family was concerned. Seilern said that his carriage would leave for Schönbrunn in an hour. He asked Beaumarchais

to come with him and find out whether the Empress would receive him at once.

In the Count's magnificent carriage Monsieur de Ronac tried to display his talents as a conversationalist. But the Governor was not accustomed to such talkativeness, and he was relieved when the carriage passed the *Glacis*, the gates of the city, when they had driven through green fields and forests, and arrived at last before the portals of the Schönbrunn Palace. He asked Beaumarchais to wait.

The residence of the German Empress of the Holy Roman Empire was not nearly as magnificent as that of the King of France. Anyone who had seen the two palaces might have thought that her position in the world was less powerful than his. Even some of the castles belonging to the French nobility were more impressive than Schönbrunn, the Empress's summer home. Beaumarchais had little time to make comparisons, for Count Seilern, obviously excited, soon returned. Seilern asked Beaumarchais to come with him. Her Majesty would receive him.

The ladies and gentlemen of the Schönbrunn Court were surprised when one hour, two hours, three hours had passed—was the mysterious visitor still with Maria Theresa? Who was he? Why had he come? An aristocrat carrying his arm in a sling? And he had spent three hours with the Empress, who usually planned her day very carefully and who never wasted time?

At first, despite himself, Beaumarchais was shy. This woman, who appeared to be so kindly, asked very direct questions. He was by nature so adjustable, however, that he soon felt her dominating manner to be a pose. She knew that he had undoubtedly come to talk about her daughter, and, as far as this interview was concerned, she was not an Empress but a mother. He quietly described his journey. He said that he had been in England, at The Hague, and that then, on his way to Nürnberg—he could not recall the name of

the place, Her Majesty must forgive him, but he did not speak German—he had been attacked by the men whom he had been pursuing. He did not regret his injuries, for he had received them in the service of his Monarch and his beloved Queen. He was concerned only with the suppression of the dangerous pamphlet.

He knew that he must make Maria Theresa ask him to read the pamphlet to her. If she did so, he was sure he would have succeeded. She would wish to suppress the pamphlet. After all, what would a few thousand golden ducats mean to the Empress of the Holy Roman Empire?

Soon the Empress asked him to read the pamphlet. She listened attentively. But he cleverly interrupted his reading with accounts of prominent individuals at the French Court. His remarks caused her to question him, and she was convinced that this Frenchman really knew what was happening at Versailles. If she could have been quite natural she would have asked him all the questions troubling her, but she had to conduct herself as an Empress, satisfied with her divine omnipotence. If she could not hear good news, she could at least hear the bad news so often and she could fit in what she heard with her own ideas, with the reports and messages she received, and in the end she would convince herself that there was not a word of truth in any of them.

Her daughter an adulteress? A child not her own foisted on the nation? Maria Theresa, who was very fond of children, could not resign herself to the thought that her daughter should not fondle her own, but another woman's child. She desired to read the pamphlet herself, and asked Beaumarchais for it. But this Frenchman, who had told her such exciting things, seemed to be agitated himself. He had gesticulated, he had tried to convince her, and he looked very flushed. And he had been wounded. Maria Theresa thought that he was not well. As she was interested in the physical well-being of everyone she met, and always advised bleeding when

people were ill, she recommended this operation to him, and dismissed him graciously.

She had become fond of him, as she was of everyone whom she met in the course of her life. She was well disposed towards all humanity with the exception of the *méchant homme* in Berlin. Obviously Monsieur de Ronac was doing his duty and serving his King, she thought. Then she retired with the pamphlet.

It was not agreeable reading, apart from the slander about her daughter. It was unpleasant for this old woman, who longed to become a grandmother, to read that she was accused of having shown Kaunitz, her Minister of State, more than the gracious approval of an Empress who has been well served. Kaunitz and she : Her common sense prompted her to act. The writer of the pamphlet had told her what she must do. The manuscript was sent to Kaunitz.

Prince Kaunitz was deeply interested in France. He had spent the happiest period of his life in Paris. The outstanding desire of his life had been to unite Austria and France. He was so enthusiastic about French customs and manners that he instructed his valet not to have his laundry done in Vienna, but to send it to Paris to be washed and ironed. He spent six thousand *gulden* a year on this luxury, and he never knew that his valet preferred the waters of the Danube to those of the Seine, and that he favoured domestic laundresses. The valet included the high costs of sending the laundry to Paris in his accounts, but the laundry was actually done in Vienna. The Prince was quite satisfied with his illusion. After his success in France he left Paris. He was promoted from the post of an Ambassador to that of a Minister, but in Vienna he continued his French habits and he lived as he had lived with so much pleasure in Paris.

This statesman, who was Frederick the Great's political antipode,



MARIA THERESA
After a contemporary portrait

shared the Prussian's passion for everything French. Kaunitz had imported the fashionable admiration of the Encyclopedists and of Voltaire to Vienna; he spoke French more often than he did German, and his predilection for Paris was so marked that the population of Vienna, who loved Kaunitz, ridiculed his exaggerated preference. Kaunitz' friendly and respectful attitude towards Madame de Pompadour had made him appear to be dependent on France. It was said that Austrian politics were dictated by French politics.

Beaumarchais did not believe that Kaunitz would interfere with his plan, or oppose it. He considered the Prince an insignificant aristocrat, who, as such men made a career in Versailles, had attained the highest position in the State because he was well connected with the House of Lorraine.

Kaunitz was profoundly interested in the manuscript. Above all, he was concerned with Marie Antoinette's position at the French Court. For, contrary to the public's opinion about him, he desired, through the young Queen, to achieve an Austrian ascendancy in France: the policies adopted by France were to be dependent on Austria. The contents of the manuscript struck him as improbable. Besides, it was crudely written, and Kaunitz, who appreciated good French, was disgusted with it. Obviously, this was the work of a blackmailer. After he had read it, Kaunitz asked himself the obvious question. Why had Beaumarchais brought the manuscript to Vienna instead of taking it direct to Paris? Did he really, as he claimed, want to prevent the King of France, who had sent him on this mission, from entertaining an unjust suspicion against his wife? Was Beaumarchais more eager to serve the Queen than the King? Was he over-zealous or . . .?

Kaunitz was suspicious by nature. He wanted clarity. And as the whole affair was puzzling, he decided to investigate it at once. Beaumarchais had been sentenced, he was in disgrace. Kaunitz would not offend against Court customs if he was rude to him,

despite the fact that Monsieur de Ronac had identified himself as a special representative of his King. Kaunitz glanced once more at Beaumarchais' report of the attack near Nürnberg, and ordered an investigation to be made. Then he dictated a letter to the Austrian Ambassador in Paris, took measures against Beaumarchais, and filed the manuscript. He informed the Empress that he was dealing with the case.

In the meantime Beaumarchais was busy writing letters : to Count Seilern, to the Empress, to Paris. He would have plenty of time to see Vienna, he thought, for he would be there a few days longer. He sat in his room at the inn, contemplating his interview with Maria Theresa. He had suggested to her to have the pamphlet printed in Vienna after the passages attacking Marie Antoinette had been deleted. Beaumarchais was sure that he would succeed, that the Empress would spend a small fortune to suppress this libellous pamphlet. For had he not been received in audience by Maria Theresa a few hours after his arrival. Had she not been gracious to him ; yes, had she not almost honoured him with her favour ? Had she not been worried about his health ? Health ! He thought over the unofficial letters he had sent to Paris, his impudent and ironical comment on this struggle with his opponent, how he had " been encircled by one man." He had written about his wonderful journey down the Danube, describing the landscape on both banks of the river. His own pleasant thoughts made him long for some wine, made of the grapes growing on the steep inclines of the Wachau. He ordered his evening meal and went to sleep happily.

The next morning he was awakened roughly. Two officers, their daggers drawn, and eight grenadiers, with fixed bayonets, stood before him. Count Seilern's secretary handed him a letter, which made it quite clear that he had been arrested. He was still half asleep and he resisted. They wanted to seize his letters and documents ? No ! " Do not offer any resistance," the secretary

commanded. "I offer resistance only to highwaymen, not to Emperors," Beaumarchais replied.

As soon as the proceedings of arrest were over, Beaumarchais was left alone. He hoped to flee at once, but he soon realised that his room was being guarded. The faces of the eight grenadiers altered, but the uniforms remained the same. His guard was changed regularly. Nevertheless, he hoped that he would be released that same day, and with this aim in view he wrote increasingly violent letters to Count Seilern, but his efforts were in vain. These letters were read by the various officials concerned, and finally reached Count Kaunitz' desk. He was amused by Beaumarchais' violent temperament. He was familiar with the famous *Mémoires*, and he now enjoyed a free specimen of the writer's style. Beaumarchais' letters were quite unlike the pamphlet. If Kaunitz had known Morande's style, he would undoubtedly have recognised it in the manuscript Beaumarchais had given the Empress.

The Prince's amusement increased when he received his reports from Nürnberg about the assault on Beaumarchais. The coach-driver declared in his statement: "That it seemed to him that the passenger had inflicted an injury on himself with a razor which he had taken out on the journey." Kaunitz decided that Beaumarchais' account of this incident was so untrustworthy that the other tales he had told in Vienna might be equally untrue. The Empress was inclined to treat him as a nefarious impostor, and to have him deported from Vienna and Austria within two hours. She wanted him to realise that no one had been duped by him. But Kaunitz urged her to wait for a final explanation of the affair.

In the meantime Beaumarchais was again in a trap. The same grenadiers remained before his door; the same view, which had charmed him at first, now maddened him whenever he looked out of the window. He threatened Seilern that he would go mad. As a result, the Governor of Lower Austria, unwilling any longer to be disturbed by these temperamental letters, ordered ink, pens, and

paper to be removed from the prisoner's room. This was the worst calamity that could have happened to Beaumarchais: he could no longer write, he could only think. As he could not speak German, he could not even talk to the grenadiers. He was desperate. Was he never to be successful in anything he undertook? Was the intrigue, which he had so carefully planned, to be a failure?

A visitor, whom Kaunitz sent to see him, represented the only diversion he enjoyed during his arrest, which lasted for several weeks. Herr von Sonnenfels, the Chancellor's chief assistant, was a Jew, born in the Ghetto. His achievements as a writer and his knowledge of political science had placed him "in his present fortunate position." The Imperial Councillor loved literature; he was familiar, not only with Beaumarchais' *Mémoires*, but with his other works as well. This man, who was born in the small town of Nikolsburg, in Moravia, as a "Jew belonging to the principality of Dietrichstein," was flattered by this opportunity to talk to one of the most famous, though most notorious, of French authors. Sonnenfels, who shared his superior officer's enthusiasm for French culture, regretted the Prince's strict orders that he was not to enter into conversation with the French writer. Sonnenfels had been instructed to be an ear and not a mouth. He now sat opposite this excited man, who, so Sonnenfels noticed not without regret, was contradicting himself constantly. He would first give one account of the case, then another which was quite different. Beaumarchais spoke so well, however, that the Councillor was impressed despite himself. His attention was arrested by the prisoner. But when Beaumarchais offered him a copy of the *Mémoires*, he refused it, though the Frenchman flatteringly suggested that Sonnenfels give him one of his works in return. Under the present circumstances, Sonnenfels pointed out, he could hardly accept it; another time he would be charmed. When he left Beaumarchais he unwillingly contributed to the investigation of the case by a statement which he took to Kaunitz.

Beaumarchais derived one benefit from Sonnenfels' visit: he was again given ink, pens, and paper. Even an excursion into fantasy, however, which was now possible, did not compensate him for the enforced inactivity. He had become accustomed to travel, to move about, to see the world as it really was, and not as it existed in his imagination. He was so restless that, when he was released, he declared that he did not wish to remain in Vienna another hour. No, Vienna was not the place for him. He must hurry back to France and gather up once more the entangled threads. God knew what his employer, Monsieur de Sartines, had been told about him by letter; God knew what the King thought about his journey. Beaumarchais believed that he would not be reinstated for a long time to come. He guessed that Kaunitz had said: "A careful consideration of the circumstances leads one to suspect that Beaumarchais himself manufactured the libellous manuscript."

Monsieur de Sartines, however, did not care to accept this accusation, despite the convincing proofs which he had received. He preferred simply to take cognisance of the fact that the Empress Maria Theresa considered Beaumarchais an impostor. Sartines did not wish to ruin his confidential agent because he had gone to Vienna. The King of France, too, informed about the affair, was conciliatory. If the assault on Beaumarchais had been invented, he had described it so well that even serious Louis XVI could not help smiling. Sartines, too, had been very much amused, and neither the King nor the Minister of Police had any desire to punish him.

When Kaunitz, usually so francophil, heard how leniently this adventurer had been treated, he became thoughtful. Had Sartines been a partner to this conspiracy? Did he overlook Beaumarchais' deceit because the throne of the Bourbons was already rotting away and the Minister was indifferent to what had happened? Were the reports from France true, so true that the ultimate decay would not be long delayed? Was the young King incapable of changing the

old system? Agreements arranged by word of mouth and signed treaties had made Austria an ally of France, but this alliance would be effective only in the event of international political complications. Kaunitz had no right officially to criticise France's internal administration. He kept his impressions to himself. He did not impart them even to his old friend Maria Theresa. She could not help this situation as an Empress; much less could she be of assistance as a mother. Kaunitz did not wish to cause her unnecessary anxiety.

CHAPTER V

BEAUMARCHAIS was good-humoured on his journey to France. To compensate him for his arrest he had received a thousand *ducats* from the Empress. At first, with a lordly gesture, he had refused this gift, but later he decided to accept it. Could he stubbornly refuse when he had been told that the Empress might take offence if he did? He was a free man once more, and he was sure that his honour would be vindicated. He considered: He could not be blamed for any of his actions unless perhaps he had been too eager to serve his King. For no one could prove that on his journey from London to Amsterdam and Vienna he had been pursuing a fictitious character and not a publisher of flesh and blood. He realised that he might not be rewarded, but that equally he would not be punished.

He stopped in Augsburg. He was relieved to have left Austrian territory, and he decided to sleep over his problems before continuing his journey. Johann Wolfgang Goethe's *Clavigo* was announced on a placard in front of a theatre he passed. Beaumarchais studied the placard; his own name was included among the persons in the play. So he was famous even in this provincial German town; he was to be seen on the stage; he had become, as it were, an historical figure. Had his *Mémoire, Fragment de mon voyage en Espagne*, made so profound an impression abroad that a German playwright had dramatised it?

The landlord from his inn interpreted for him at the theatre. Beaumarchais, sitting excitedly in the stalls, was by no means pleased with this picture of himself. The actor, who had dared to represent him, was awkward. The language seemed harsh to the Frenchman, who did not know German. Besides, the construction of the play displeased Beaumarchais. Very much annoyed, he left the theatre, went back to the inn, and wrote a letter about this

performance. The author was a Johann Wolfgang Goethe—a name hard to remember, and which, by the way, did not particularly interest Beaumarchais. Beaumarchais summarised his criticism of the play briefly: "This German overdid my story by including a love-affair and a duel. This reflects more shallow wit than talent."

Before the severe critic went to sleep his humorous imagination delighted in the idea that Clavigo, too, might one day see this play ! that he might witness his own dishonourable behaviour. But, Beaumarchais thought, this Goethe probably lived in some small German town, and his *Clavigo* would never be given outside the district in which it had been written. Marsollier's play, of course, would become better known, for Beaumarchais was convinced that he could use his influence to make it famous.

As soon as Beaumarchais reached Paris he ceased to be concerned with Marsollier or Goethe. He was compelled quickly to readjust himself. He went over his letters and reports about his adventures, his efforts to suppress the pamphlet, his impressions of the journey. He did not want to contradict himself. Apart from the fact that his honour was at stake, he must consider the money he could claim for this journey. If his accounts "were found to be correct," he could demand seventy-two thousand *livres*. This sum would be refused if either Monsieur de Sartines or the King distrusted him.

Beaumarchais was prepared for the worst when he went to see the Minister of Police. But—had his luck changed ?—Sartines' manner was not pompous and official; he received Beaumarchais with good-natured irony. Even when Beaumarchais complained of the outrageous manner in which he had been treated in Vienna, a treatment which offended against all international courtesy, Sartines was not severe. The Minister of Police merely interrupted him by saying: "Well, they took you to be an adventurer, that is all."

He was not in disgrace ? His journey had not been a failure ?

On the contrary, he was welcomed as an official expert on libellous pamphlets, as a man who understood their origin, as the only person who could suppress them. At this time, when even the King of France was forced to consider public opinion, this was a very important position, and Beaumarchais hoped that it would lead to his reinstatement at the Court.

He was given seventy-two thousand *livres*, but he demanded that —apart from the thousand *ducats*—the Minister of Police must make Maria Theresa pay him an indemnity. His honour must be vindicated in Vienna as well as in Paris. He was not content until the Empress's Ambassador in Paris gave him a ring set with a huge diamond as a compensation for the suspicion which had been cast on him in Vienna.

Beaumarchais felt at home again in Paris. The ring proved his success. He had money—at least enough to move back into his house with his family. He asked his quiet friend Thérèse, who had comforted him in a motherly fashion during his *Mémoires* battle, to join him in the rue de Condé. Her name, a Swiss one, had been Willermawla, but henceforth, beautifully dressed, she was introduced to society as “Madame de Villers.” He had been victorious in his fight for happiness. Was his future not assured, or was he still in any danger?

Beaumarchais, as was typical of him, contemplated his situation, hoping to find a new spring-board into the future. The only official recently appointed by the new King was Turgot, the Minister of Finance. His office was the most important one in the new Government, for Louis XVI was frightened “by the burden which had been imposed upon him.” The public exchequer was empty, the taxpayers impoverished, and if the finances of the State were to be saved, a new means of raising money had to be found. As a provincial governor, Turgot had revived the economic prosperity of this ruined province by reforms. He had introduced novel schemes; for the first time in road-building, paid labour instead of the statute-

labour of the peasants had been used. To do so, Turgot had demanded money instead of the payments in kind which had heretofore been levied from certain classes of the population. Turgot was a reformer. He believed that to save the monarchy, the King's household, the economic system of the entire nation must be fundamentally reorganised. Above all, Louis XV's financial mismanagement, his inadequate administration of the country had to be reformed. Turgot declared that first of all the unpopular new Parliament must be dissolved and the old one re-established.

Beaumarchais welcomed this idea. He was determined to do what he could to discredit the new Parliament. His imagination was at work, and he appeared unexpectedly at a reception given at Etoiles by Monsieur Lenormant, Madame de Pompadour's former husband. In honour of the host's birthday a "parade" had been arranged, and Beaumarchais had written some scenes in verse from the life of the people. Most of these scenes, which were very improper, were in the "parade" style. They reviled the Parliament which had sentenced him. Lenormant's guests enjoyed his verses, and without knowing why Beaumarchais had written them, they repeated the songs in Paris the next morning.

The population loved these lines; they laughed, whistling or singing them whenever a Member of Parliament drove through the streets. Beaumarchais, who had almost been forgotten, became popular again overnight.

Monsieur de Sartines had been promoted to the post of Minister of the Navy, but his former confidant, Monsieur de Lenoir, who had succeeded him as Minister of Police, told Sartines that the people approved of the new Government. Would it be possible at last to bring in some measure which would make a Minister popular? But how could such a measure be introduced without appearing too obvious?

The new Ministers knew nothing about their departments, and they hesitated to ask advice of established scholars. They therefore

turned to Beaumarchais, whose personal experience had made him familiar with Parliaments. Though he was in disgrace, though his civil liberty had been sentenced to death, he was instructed by the Ministers to report on the record of a former judge.

Naturally his report was prejudiced in favour of the old Parliamentary Councillors, and he based his conclusions on clever legal arguments. Beaumarchais "had called on his spirit to help him." Whenever his personal interests were involved he served the public well. If the old Parliament was re-established, the former colleagues of Monsieur Goezmann would be dismissed, and Beaumarchais' sentence would be repealed. This was the first step towards his reinstatement.

Beaumarchais' position was improving. He had decided to give up the uncertain career of an adventurer. A new period began. Was a development beginning which would finally carry him along with it? He realised that he could not wait for a lucky chance. The new Government appreciated his services; he must see that his personal dignity was recognised as well. He tried to meet the new Ministers. Monsieur Turgot, a passionate scholar, disapproved of the manner in which politicians were exploiting the serious political situation to win popular support, but he was not antagonistic towards Beaumarchais. Above all, Beaumarchais decided, he must try to win the Prime Minister's support. Beaumarchais made a systematic effort to achieve this end.

Old Comte de Maurepas, who had been in disgrace since he protested against "the Pompadour's Cabinet," had remained malicious; he still enjoyed writing epigrams, and circulating the verses written by pamphleteers. He loved gossip as much as ever. He had been banished from the Court for ten years, but his urge to communicate his ideas persisted, despite the dozen volumes of his *Mémoires*. He did not refuse to meet Beaumarchais, "this past

master in slander." On the contrary, he thanked Monsieur de Sartines for suggesting this meeting.

Their casual acquaintance developed into a great friendship. Soon Beaumarchais was a favourite, not only in Prince de Conti's home; the Prime Minister was equally fond of him. He would repeat in Versailles what he had heard in the Temple. Monsieur de Sartines, Comte de Maurepas, and Prince de Conti learned a great deal from his accounts of the conversations he heard in aristocratic drawing-rooms and in the homes of the bourgeoisie. Beaumarchais also passed on the gossip of the market-place; he understood the moods of the people; he knew whether they were satisfied or not. "Figaro here—Figaro there—" As a useful go-between he was soon indispensable to all three men. He was a reporter without a newspaper, his information service functioned more efficiently than that of the police, or than the King's secret service. Beaumarchais felt that he had at last begun his career. But what did he really want to do? What should he try to attain? What would he do in the future?

The inevitable course of events, the great decisions of history, relieved Beaumarchais of the responsibility of making these decisions for himself. Unconsciously he was paving the way for the French Revolution, but against his will he was sent to carry out the one historic mission which he performed consciously.

Since the peace which ended the Seven Years' War Versailles had been resentful towards England for the loss of the French colonies. France's sea power and her foreign trade had declined. Towards the end of his life even Louis XV had appreciated what the loss of the colonies meant to France. His hope to humiliate his neighbour across the Channel, to conquer this rival at last, had been inherited by his successor. Nevertheless, the young King did not believe

that the time had come for a war with England. On the contrary, in order not to increase France's financial difficulties, war had to be avoided. For years a former diplomat, who had unexpectedly changed from one of Louis XV's secret agents into a blackmailer, had been threatening to hand over some of Louis XV's private letters to the English. These letters would have revealed to England Louis XV's secret plans for landing French troops on English soil.

If Louis XVI had explained that he did not intend to carry out his predecessor's intentions, war would not have broken out, but the publication of these letters might have disturbed France's international relations. Besides, they would have revealed that, apart from his regular foreign representatives, the King of France maintained a secret service, that he maintained secret diplomatic connections. The prestige of Louis XVI's official ambassadors abroad would have been shaken.

The man responsible for this dangerous situation was notorious in England and France. He had begun his career in the diplomatic service ; he had gone on a mission to Russia. Dressed in women's clothes, he had gained Empress Elisabeth's confidence, and his mission had been successful. During the Seven Years' War he distinguished himself in the uniform of a Captain of the Dragoons, and finally he was sent to the French Embassy in London. He did very well, and during the Ambassador's absence he had been appointed as the Minister Plenipotentiary.

Up to this time there was no more zealous and unimpeachable diplomat in the service than the Chevalier d'Éon. Then, however, the Marquis de Querchy, whose first post was the difficult London Embassy, was appointed as Ambassador. D'Éon's hopes to retain his responsible position were shattered and he rebelled.

The two men disliked each other at once. D'Éon refused to hand over his credentials to this aristocrat ; he refused to accept orders except from the King. D'Éon pretended that the Marquis

had attempted to poison him, and he associated himself with the people's Lord Mayor, Wilkes. Then d'Éon made use of the freedom of the press which prevailed in London, and began a wild campaign for his case in the newspapers. In private letters, in the meantime, he assured Louis XV of his loyalty, and begged the King not to drive him to extremes—d'Éon meant by "extremes" the handing over of the King's letters to the English authorities. Finally, d'Éon was calmed down with a pension of twelve thousand *livres*, and he declared that he would enter Louis XV's secret service.

After the King's death new arrangements had to be made with him. The officials who negotiated with d'Éon thought that he was asking too much for these letters. The negotiations seemed hopeless. Then the Minister summoned Beaumarchais and showed him the correspondence with d'Éon.

Beaumarchais did not like this mission, for it would again bring him in touch with his shady friend Morande, with the underworld of writers, with whom he had been forced to associate after he had been sentenced. *The Barber of Seville* had finally been accepted; his financial situation had improved. He did not want to be a secret agent for the rest of his life. As he had been of service in so many ways, he expected soon to be reinstated and then to be raised to a higher rank.

Despite his objections Beaumarchais could not refuse to undertake this mission. But he did not agree to go until he was sent to London, not only to investigate the d'Éon case, but also to report to the King on the English colonies. Comte de Maurepas had suggested that he make this report. The Count and his colleague, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Monsieur de Vergennes, promised Beaumarchais a high office if his memorandum to the King favoured the policies they had adopted. The d'Éon case would not be difficult for him.

Beaumarchais had decided on a plan which met with the Ministers' approval, but which was more in keeping with a writer of

comedies than with a diplomatic agent. D'Éon could not be forced to give up the letters while he was in England enjoying the hospitality of a liberal nation. He must be brought to France. So far d'Éon had refused tempting offers from Choiseul, the Prime Minister, and the Comte de Broglie, the head of the Royal Secret Service, to return to France. He feared that if he came home he would end his days in a prison cell. For this reason he had not sent back all of Louis XV's letters; he published some of them, but kept others in reserve, so that he would always be in a position to compromise the King. The men negotiating with d'Éon could not assure him that, as he had committed treason, he might not be sentenced if he came to France. An extraordinary situation had to be created to meet this extraordinary case. Beaumarchais thought: in Russia d'Éon wore women's clothes. Why not explain the sudden change of an honest Captain of Dragoons and a splendid diplomat into a blackmailer and a traitor—by attributing it to a woman's whim? A woman could do anything during this age. Why not assume that d'Éon had never been a man; that actually he had always been a woman? True, as an officer he had won the highest distinction—the Cross of Louis—but bravery might be one of this strange woman's characteristics.

The Chevalier d'Éon unconsciously helped Beaumarchais. His appearance made it seem possible that this "he" might be a "she," and besides, d'Éon had made various indiscreet remarks which indicated that he might actually be a woman.

In England people were betting whether the King of France's former Minister was a man or a woman. Certain lords, eager to win their bets, suggested seizing "this gentleman or this lady" in order to prove their case. But d'Éon had locked himself up in his flat to avoid these zealous betters and to protect his precious documents. He saw only a few friends, and Morande was one of them. Beaumarchais hoped that he would take him to see d'Éon.

Before he left Paris, Beaumarchais attended the first performance

of his *Barber of Seville*. He was disappointed. As always, when a man waits too long for any pleasure, the protracted period of waiting diminishes his enjoyment. The audience, too, was not enthusiastic about his play. Writing was his "hobby." He "loved the theatre passionately"—but when more practical interests arose, he was too hard-headed to give way to this passion. Now, when good fortune seemed within his reach, he was not depressed by the failure of one of his plays. Besides, he felt that he would be able to improve *The Barber of Seville*. A few alterations. Some of the scenes must be shortened, and the dialogue, the background, and the characters themselves must be changed to suit this spoiled audience.

There are records of the meetings and conversations between Beaumarchais and d'Éon. D'Éon described the attraction which these two great adventurers had for each other as "the natural curiosity of two extraordinary animals, who are both on the alert." Beaumarchais wrote a letter to the King in which he defended d'Éon. "When one remembers that this pursued creature belongs to the weaker sex, whom everything is forgiven, one's heart is moved to pity. I venture to assure you, Sire, if this astonishing creature is carefully approached, it will be possible to master her, though she had been pursued by misfortune for twelve years."

Their favourable reports about each other actually concealed a mutual distrust. They were sufficiently alike to understand each other, and both thought the other would trap him. Beaumarchais had been instructed to pay the smallest possible price for d'Éon's documents and to get them. D'Éon was insisting on the highest price, and demanded a guarantee that he could safely return to France. Besides, he said that he must be allowed formally to take leave of the King of England. Beaumarchais had to reject this suggestion at once; it did not fit in with his plans. If d'Éon agreed

to change the boots and trousers of a Dragoon for the high heels and the hooped skirt of a lady, the former Minister could not take leave of the King of England as a young lady. He must simply disappear.

The situation was difficult for Beaumarchais. He could not force d'Éon to wear women's clothes. He could only suggest this to him; he could tactfully remind him of the bets about his sex, and make him see that a change of sex would be the only possible way for him to be forgiven for his treasonable actions and his rebellion. Beaumarchais had to give the impression that he himself believed that the man with whom he was negotiating was a young woman. And this, despite the fact that d'Éon's chin, carefully shaven though it was, showed traces of a black beard. His voice was high, his hands delicate. Besides, it did not matter whether he was a woman; it mattered only that people thought him one.

Their negotiations dragged on. Morande was called in to assure d'Éon that his dealings with Beaumarchais had been most satisfactory. Morande told d'Éon that this secret agent of the King of France had frequently been forced to change his rôle, and that he would not hesitate to change from a man into a woman.

A few months after his arrival in London, Beaumarchais wrote to the Ministers that d'Éon had promised to declare that he was a woman and to wear women's clothes henceforth. In return he must be given the assurance that his pension of twelve thousand *livres* would be continued, and that one of his trunks, which was still in pawn, would be redeemed with the compromising documents.

The written agreement between Beaumarchais and d'Éon still exists. The new young lady's statement that her sex had been confirmed by witnesses, physicians, surgeons, and matrons is legible on this document, though Beaumarchais struck it out. He preferred not to make use of physicians, surgeons, or matrons in order to ascertain that this Chevalier was an Amazon. He always finished any comedy he began. He even added that the heart of

this new young lady had been difficult to conquer. With sad irony he remarked that in the service of his King he had even been forced to accept the advances of a Captain of Dragoons.

When d'Éon returned to Paris, people in France began to bet as the English had done. Was he a man or a woman? Was the lady mentioned in the agreement with Beaumarchais, who had asked to be allowed to retire to a convent to become accustomed to her new sex, actually the woman now living in a home for aristocratic ladies? Or was "she" the sophisticated gentleman who was enjoying himself, in the manner of his contemporary Casanova, in the arms of innocent nuns? By striking out d'Éon's statement, Beaumarchais had proven to himself and to the Ministers that he had not been duped.

Not until after d'Éon's death did the facts behind the dramatic gesture with which Beaumarchais had made a woman of a man become clear. D'Éon died in London, long after the great Revolution. His body was examined. Reliable witnesses confirm that Demoiselle d'Éon, who had died in the Lord, "had possessed all masculine organs."

PART IV

THE MARRIAGE WITH THE PEOPLE

CHAPTER I

WHENEVER the door of Louis XVI's study had been closed, and he was alone at his desk, he was tempted to sit there dreaming lazily. It was difficult for him to concentrate. Memoranda from his ministers, police reports, suggestions for reform, and communications from foreign Powers lay on the polished surface before him. He was to judge and decide upon all phases of life, and life was so unfamiliar to him. Louis XVI realised that he had more good intentions than he had talents. He could not adjust himself readily to unexpected situations. His slow mind could not follow events. By the time, with his peculiar thoroughness, he had studied the position, a new development had already occurred. He would rather have been the minister in charge of some department than the King of France, who, as an absolute ruler, had to co-ordinate the various ministries. Everywhere he met with resistance. Above all, money was lacking to improve economic conditions and to alleviate the sufferings of the people. Intrigues were being organised against Turgot, who was so rich in ideas. Marie Antoinette, whom the King loved with that shy guilty love of a man who is not a man, was trying to make him listen to the luxury-loving faction at the Court. Louis XVI knew that the extravagant life round him was costing too much, and yet he was not strong enough to stop this frivolity. "*Le pauvre homme*," his wife wrote when she referred to him anonymously, and she forgot that he was King of France. Daily when this *pauvre homme*, patient and resigned to his fate, sat down at his desk, he was filled with good intentions. Letters and reports from Beaumarchais with marginal notes in Louis XVI's handwriting still exist. The King, who remained simple even in moments of gravest danger, was curiously diffident towards this versatile man, who changed his part so easily. Once, when Louis met Beaumarchais personally, the King had been repelled by him.

for the two men were alike and yet so different. Beaumarchais' bright eyes, his face which was nervous though it was growing fat, his figure, teeming with health and vigour, made him very unlike the King. Louis XVI was distrustful; Beaumarchais' respectful manner had seemed ironical. The King felt as though some unknown danger were lurking behind this apparently gay, well-dressed courtier, this over-zealous secret agent! He had flung Beaumarchais' *Mémoires*, which had amused Marie Antoinette, into the fire, but he was fascinated by the messages from his secret representative. Almost daily a report from Beaumarchais was among the pile of documents on his desk. The Comte de Maurepas and Comte de Vergennes had recommended Beaumarchais as a reliable and conscientious agent. Could personal antipathy prevent a king from reading the letters of a faithful and loyal servant? Louis XVI succumbed to his sense of duty every time he received a communication from Beaumarchais. He hesitated before taking up the carefully written sheets, but he was absorbed by them after he had read the first line. He could resist neither the contents nor the style of Beaumarchais' reports.

Beaumarchais is not only important as an individual: his private life, like a cog in a wheel, influenced world history. He informed Louis XVI, who was to die on the guillotine, of the growing unrest of the people in England. The King of France was pleased to learn that Wilkes', the Lord Mayor's, followers had been organised into an excited mob, which was menacing the aristocracy. This mass opposition was growing appreciably.

The King of France, in common with all reigning monarchs, welcomed upheavals in other countries which might save him and his people from calamity. Though domestic affairs in France were increasingly critical, Louis XVI wondered whether it was not time to take his longed-for revenge on England. The Comte de Vergennes, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, did not want to make the crisis worse by a fresh complication. But everyone was intensely

interested in what was happening across the Channel; everyone seemed to be waiting for some signal. Beaumarchais was the only man who could give this signal. Ambitious as he was, he longed for serious political activities. He was tired of working underground. No important offices of State were available; he must think out some far-reaching campaign for France, a campaign which would provide him with a suitable function.

Wilkes welcomed anyone who opposed the English Government. At the Lord Mayor's home Beaumarchais met a young American, a law student, Arthur Lee. Lee devoted less time to his studies than he did to American interests, to the movement for independence of the thirteen colonies, whose representatives later founded the famous Congress of the United States of America. The young man, whom Beaumarchais met by chance, told him about the colonies, and opened up a new world to him. Since the days when he knew Pauline, since the time when he had gained a clear insight into business affairs, he had been increasingly interested in colonial problems, but his knowledge had been confined to the French and Spanish territories in North America. He had learned which islands produced sugar or tobacco; he knew where indigo, coffee, and other colonial products were grown; but he had not visualised the vast stretches of virgin soil, the enormous forests, or the life of these early settlers.

Beaumarchais clearly remembered the conflicts which had occurred in the preceding thirty years between the English and the French pioneers in the New World. He had seen adventurous reports, but they had been somewhat distasteful to this Frenchman, who used scent, wore jibots, and whose coat was decorated with gold braid. He had read about tortures at the stake, scalp-hunting, battles with bows and arrows, a whole world of adventure, which was not popular in Europe until European countries were no longer in danger. To Beaumarchais, this cultivated Parisian, these tales did not seem in the least romantic. He had not been concerned with

America until Lee attracted his attention to the new country's economic and political problems. What had actually happened in America?

By means of increased taxation the English Government had tried to meet the rising expenditures caused by the colonial war with France. Whether American merchants liked it or not, they were forced to sell their goods in English markets through English middlemen, even when Dutch or Spanish importers in Holland or Spain offered higher prices. Apart from the implements and tools which the American colonists manufactured themselves, they had to buy English goods, or do without. American exports and imports furthermore could be shipped only in English vessels manned by English crews. The tax stamp was pasted on sacks of molasses and sugar, on parcels of tea, on newspapers and playing cards. Business and legal documents, marriage certificates, policies, newspapers, and pamphlets had to be written or printed on stamped paper. The few shillings which the settlers paid for this stamp duty were insignificant. These taxes barely covered the English Government's expenditures for the colonies. But the leaders of the rebellion, which had sprung up so rapidly in America, suddenly declared that it was not the money but the principle involved which mattered. America was not represented in the English Parliament, and therefore England had no right to levy taxes in the new country.

Pitt, the great English statesman, pointed out at the time that New York drank most deeply of the bewitched cup of delusion, and that none of the people in America seemed sober or sane. And Pitt admitted that these unfortunate Stamp Acts had completely unbalanced this excitable and distrustful population.

America solidly opposed the English tariff regulations. Any man obeying these laws, whether he really approved of them or not, was in danger of being lynched. The American boycott against the mother country had begun.

Lee explained Anglo-American relations to Beaumarchais, who

saw the situation clearly and simply. France and England were rivals. War seemed inevitable. The American colonies wanted to secede from the mother country. If France supported their rebellion, England would be forced to concentrate on the suppression of this revolt. Then France could prepare for the inevitable war of revenge, and if the rebellion were successful, the colonies, which would have become independent, would in turn support France. These colonies must furthermore guarantee the inviolability of the French colonies.

These were hypothetical arguments, but Beaumarchais wanted to prove them—the frequent questions asked by dissatisfied members of the House of Commons showed him how he could get these proofs. The French Ambassador in London devoted himself to his social duties; he entertained lavishly and sent official reports to Versailles. Beaumarchais, on the other hand, gained insight into England's secret political activities. He called almost daily at the home of Wilkes, the revolutionary Lord Mayor, but, double-faced as usual, he had not sacrificed the friendship of Lord Rochford, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

Lord Rochford appreciated Beaumarchais' gifts as a musician and a writer, and the Englishman also realised that he could discuss many other subjects with this Frenchman who knew literature and philosophy, and who was a clever politician. Rochford's confidence in Beaumarchais was strengthened by his air of courteous indifference which he assumed when the most vital questions were discussed. Often Rochford told Beaumarchais more than he had intended revealing to him.

The English Government was not inclined to grant any of the rebellious Americans' demands. Why should these Western colonials enjoy preference? The same laws governed all the English colonists, the same system of taxation must be accepted by them all, whether they lived in India or America. They were all forced to purchase finished products in the British Isles and to sell their own

products in British markets. Prices were fixed by the City in London. Any colonist who questioned this state of affairs was considered a rebel and punishable as a traitor. The English garrisons in North America were ordered to suppress any armed revolt by force. Beaumarchais reported to Louis XVI that the tension in England had become intolerable. His sources of information had increased. The newspaper men, whom he had met in Wilkes' home, kept him accurately informed. But Beaumarchais interpreted events in England from the French point of view: his conclusions would probably have been correct had these developments occurred in France. Applied to England, however, his reasoning was wrong. The opposition, which had originally supported the claims of the American colonists, veered round as soon as England seemed to be in serious danger. The Revolution prophesied by Beaumarchais did not occur. On the contrary, public opinion in London was united against America. Versailles could no longer expect that social unrest would spread in England. France could not openly support the rebels without precipitating a war. Beaumarchais therefore decided how this could be done secretly.

He foresaw the crisis a year before it developed, and when he prepared a memorandum he was as excited as he had been when he wrote his *Mémoire* in the Goezmann case. In this political report he showed the same incisive insight, the same ability to point out and emphasise the essential factors in the situation. In this *Mémoire* to the most Christian King, Beaumarchais could not, of course, be witty. The author of *The Barber of Seville*, who was devoting his few leisure hours to the dialogues of the *Marriage of Figaro*, was forced to be serious in his reports to Louis XVI. Between the lines, however, his consuming ambition and his desire to help the Americans were quite obvious.

Beaumarchais was curiously excited. He knew only one American, who came from a city, but behind him he visualised thousands of settlers wearing broad-brimmed hats, he saw their



Dessiné d'après nature par L. Libbowenik

*Louis Seize
France et
Né à Versailles le
Marié le 16*



*Roi de
de l'Espagne
23 Août 1754
de l'âge 1770*

LOUIS XVI

After a drawing by Libbowenik

tanned faces, their roughened hands. He pictured them as hard-working men fighting for their liberty. This courtier, who was a professional flatterer of influential men, discovered in himself a love of liberty. Did the Americans' perseverance in this primitive country, did their puritanical morals move Beaumarchais because they were like his Protestant ancestors? The English colonists would have welcomed reforms, they had not wilfully begun this rebellion. These men, who for decades had shown their fighting spirit in the conflict with the French colonists, were stubbornly determined to force England to give them their liberty, just as with equal tenacity they had forced the earth to yield each ear of corn. Beaumarchais showed his knowledge of strategy by realising that they would ultimately be victorious, even if England sent the largest army in the world to America. For behind them, in case a retreat became necessary, were the vast Western areas which had not yet been cleared. If they were temporarily defeated, the colonists could retire to these forests, and, joining forces with the natives, they could renew their attack. They would need arms and implements which would no longer be available if, by cutting themselves off from England, they ceased to be in touch with civilised countries.

Beaumarchais' imagination as a writer helped him to understand the colonists' needs. He implored France's help for the Americans, he asked and begged for it, he tried to persuade the French Government to come to their assistance. He received no answer. Louis XVI understood the situation, and so did his ministers, but they were afraid that if France supported the colonies this would mean war with England. Beaumarchais' arguments were convincing, but the risk was too great.

Then it occurred to Beaumarchais that good advice was not enough, he must offer his services and act. "I offer my head as security that my plan will succeed, and that it will not expose my King or any of his ministers to danger." In vain. Beaumarchais-

would have given up his plan if, as so often happened to him, a chance event had not intervened.

A Nantes merchant had gone to America to buy goods. The vessel carrying his cargo was stopped on the high seas by English warships and sailed to Bristol Harbour. Lord Rochford told Beaumarchais about this case, because he wanted to know what measures the King of France would take in this connection. The Secretary of State expressed the hope that the merchants of Nantes would be punished for trading with the rebellious Americans. Beaumarchais anticipated the official answer which Lord Rochford later received from Versailles. He told Rochford that England might be justified in seizing a ship carrying munitions on the high seas, but that any curtailment of the activities of French merchants was an unauthorised interference in the freedom of trade of Louis XVI's subjects and an infringement of his sovereign rights.

Beaumarchais' report on his conversation with Rochford increased the agitation felt about the case in France. Versailles was pleased with a Frenchman who had defended his sovereign's rights on his own initiative. Beaumarchais' correspondence with Comte Vergennes was now very confidential, but Beaumarchais' insistence was ineffectual. He wrote: "In view of England's critical financial position and her stupid Government, she will be unable to conquer the Americans, if France supplies them with arms, gunpowder, and above all, with money and engineers." Still no favourable news. Certain that his letters would impress Versailles, Beaumarchais had informed Lee that negotiations had practically been concluded, and that Congress could count on France's financial support.

Did this news encourage the Americans in their resistance, did it strengthen their purpose and enable them to take Boston and New York? If they had known that Beaumarchais' promise to Lee, who was only a student, and not an experienced politician, was based on the writer's imagination and the student's faith in him, the Americans might perhaps have given up their struggle.

It was very awkward for England when hostilities began on North American soil, and the King of England hired the Margrave of Hesse-Cassel's army to suppress the rebellion by force. Louis XVI, in the meantime, submitting to the anti-Turgot faction at Court, had dismissed the Minister of Finance. In eloquent words Turgot had reminded his countrymen of the execution of Charles I, who had been too weak to conquer the rebellion in England. Marie Antoinette had interpreted this allusion as a threat against her husband, this poor man, and for once, though at the wrong moment, Louis XVI had wanted to show that he could be strong.

When the news of Turgot's dismissal reached London, Beaumarchais thought that his hopes would be shattered if Choiseul became Prime Minister. He was the minister who, after reading Beaumarchais' secret reports from Spain, had said that the Government must ignore him.

The idea that France should help America, an idea originally conceived by Beaumarchais, persisted only in his imagination. He hurried to Versailles without stopping in Paris, and he was so exhausted when he arrived that he could hardly hold his pen. But he wrote, urgently requesting an audience; he insisted that his reports be reread, he begged the ministers, he implored the King at least to give him a hearing. He wanted Louis XVI to sacrifice two or three million in order to save three hundred million later. Beaumarchais assured his Government that his diplomatic plans would guarantee peace and prevent war. If he was not the right man to carry out his plans, he urged that someone else be appointed. Once more he pointed out England's many difficulties, difficulties which France might still escape.

In principle Comte Vergennes agreed with Beaumarchais, but the Foreign Minister was unwilling to help America in the way suggested by Beaumarchais. Vergennes decided to await the return of a courier who had gone to Spain to obtain the acquiescence of this friendly Court. Then Beaumarchais was told that the English

Government as well as the Americans themselves must be led to believe that the French Government had nothing to do with this help to America, that it was being organised by an individual financier as a private speculation. Beaumarchais was secretly given one million *livres*. The same sum was to be paid over to him by the Spanish Court. With these two millions and the co-operation of private merchants, he was to found a large contract-business. Then, on his own risk, he was to supply the Americans, fighting for their independence, with arms, munitions, uniforms, and other war materials. The French arsenals would sell him arms and munitions. Beaumarchais was also instructed not to demand money from the Americans, as they had none. Instead he was to accept payment in colonial produce, and the sale of these goods in France would be facilitated for him. It was essential that, in the long run, this financial venture was to be self-supporting. But as the Ministry's support or non-support of this enterprise would depend upon the political situation of the moment, Beaumarchais was to keep accounts of his own profits and losses. The Ministry would decide later whether or not subsidies would be granted him, or whether he would be reimbursed for the sums he had expended.

On the tenth of June, 1776, Beaumarchais signed a receipt for a million received in cash. His carriage, laden with the sacks of gold, reached his house in the rue de Condé. When, with the help of his servants, he poured the money upon the floor of the large reception room, his sisters were not surprised, for since his childhood they had considered him a magician, a prince from a fairy-tale. Neither his father nor his sisters, nor Thérèse, his mistress, who was hurriedly summoned, doubted that Pierre Augustin would add many more millions to those before them. He himself was realising, on the other hand, that for the first time he had influenced the history of the world.

Congress, proclaiming the Americans' independence of England,

met in Philadelphia barely four weeks after Beaumarchais had signed his agreement with Comte Vergennes. There was a preamble to the Declaration of Independence. Thomas Jefferson, the young representative, had based the Constitution of the new United States of North America on the "unalienable rights of men." "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

In the United States privileges of birth were abolished. When Beaumarchais heard this he realised that his scheme of life had been wrong. He was forty-four, and he had devoted his youth to rising above his original station in life. Instead, he could have directed his tremendous energies towards the aim which the free Americans had now realised.

Heretofore he had been wrong; henceforth, so he resolved, he would live the right sort of life. He was too active by temperament and too busy to regret his wasted efforts, his false ambitions. Once more he completely changed his purpose in life.

Until this time Beaumarchais' actions, thoughts, and hopes had been concentrated on himself, on his success, and on his wealth. Now he was suddenly absorbed by the ideal of liberty and the rights of man. So far he had defended only his personal interests. This change in him, occurring as rapidly as a stroke of lightning, made him wish to fight, not for himself, but for others, for the future of humanity. He expressed these desires in the *Marriage of Figaro*, which he was then writing, and in his activities on behalf of the Americans.

Beaumarchais' experience was not unusual among Frenchmen whose principles had altered: intellectually the philosophers had prepared him for this change. The Declaration of Independence, the basis of the American Constitution, won the support of Frenchmen for the "Sons of Freedom," who were not only pioneers

in the New World, but apparently pioneers in the new order as well.

Beaumarchais received the first million from the French Treasury on June sixteenth. On the eleventh of August the second million, contributed by Spain, flowed into his exchequer. The Comte de Vergennes' receipt for this sum was not signed with Beaumarchais' real name. The notorious and famous man signed the letters and documents which left his office as "Roderigue Hortalez and Company" in order not to expose himself or the French Government.

In less than two months Beaumarchais had moved from his house in the rue de Condé to the enormous Hôtel de Hollande. He expanded his household, which was large enough as it was; he also needed offices and storerooms for his business with America. A few dozen clerks, hastily engaged, dealt with the correspondence, which grew tremendously in a few weeks. For Beaumarchais was in communication with factories manufacturing arms, munitions, uniforms, and other goods; he was enquiring at State arsenals whether they could sell him other war materials; he was preparing consignments, and writing receipts. Beaumarchais' versatile past had fitted him for the administration of the vast enterprise which he had organised so rapidly. Everything that Duverney had taught him, his unsuccessful efforts in Spain, his commercial experience in France, was now useful to him and therefore to the United States. No one else could have assembled the large shipments so quickly, no one could have arranged so efficiently to buy and sell on credit. For the business in the Hôtel de Hollande had to be carried on in secret. The various periods of Beaumarchais' life, which he considered a waste, now came to his aid in the great task he had set himself: to assist this handful of unarmed men to defeat England's superior strength.

It was known in London that Versailles was helping the American colonists. Lord Stormont was sent to consult the Comte de

Maurepas and Comte Vergennes and to maintain peace between France and England. Stormont's reports were satisfactory. The French Foreign Minister, so Stormont gathered from their conversation, shared his own views. The American rebellion, so Vergennes said to Lord Stormont, might eventually mean that "not a mile of that hemisphere belonged to a European Power." This was a far-sighted view, and it was Lord Stormont's, but the English representative believed that invisible hands were at work in France. His spies reported that cannon and field pieces, bombs and cartridges had been purchased in France, and were ready for shipment in French ports. Lord Stormont questioned Comte Vergennes. Was the French Foreign Minister's answer sincere? Did it reflect the fear of a man who has gone too far against his own will? Vergennes said: "The sympathy which the French feel for the Americans is a great and serious danger. Do not think that this sympathy is based on a love of America or a hatred of England. No, the roots are deeper than that." Was Vergennes referring to his own countrymen's growing love of liberty? "A superficial observer might not recognise these roots, but we [in Versailles] are giving this problem our most serious consideration."

Lord Stormont was suspicious. He reported to London about the "unrestrained spirit" which prevailed in Versailles. But he could not find the busy hands behind these subterranean exports of arms to America. Nor could he stop them. He knew that Mr. Silas Deane, a representative of the Philadelphia Congress, had seen Comte Vergennes, but, so Lord Stormont learned from a secret agent, this man did not remain long with Vergennes. Then he spoke briefly to Gerard, Vergennes' chief assistant, but otherwise he was not in touch with any Government office. Nevertheless, Lord Stormont was sure that France was helping America. But how? Above all, how would these arms and munitions be shipped overseas?

The English Fleet was instructed to watch the French ports, and

to prevent any French vessel laden with war material from sailing to America.

At first Mr. Silas Deane was deeply disappointed by the casual manner with which Comte Vergennes received him. Deane was told that a "business man" would supply twenty-five thousand men with arms and munitions. American standards were different; twenty-five thousand soldiers were considered a large army, they represented the entire conscription of the colonies. To reach this number the last reserves of men fit for war service had been called up. And one individual business man was to supply the necessary war material : Deane went to the huge Hôtel de Hollande, where he saw the head of the firm of Roderigue Hortalez and Company. He had expected to meet a cold-blooded business man, but instead he was received by an enthusiastic, courteous, and cultured man, who warmly congratulated him on the Declaration of Independence. This was puzzling, but Beaumarchais' proposals were entirely satisfactory to Mr. Silas Deane. Roderigue Hortalez and Company were prepared to grant the United States of America a long-term credit for the desired shipments : Mr. Deane replied: " My countrymen do not accept credits for longer than a year. And as Congress has purchased large stocks of tobacco and other products in Virginia and Maryland, these products are to be shipped abroad as soon as vessels are available. I do not doubt therefore that you will receive payment in kind within six months, and that all your demands will be settled within a year."

Beaumarchais accepted this businesslike explanation, because he believed that he "was dealing with a virtuous people."

This well-dressed man, who effusively escorted the simple American to the door, completed the deliveries so efficiently that the representatives of Congress did not regret their decision to deal with him. The American vessels had not yet arrived : Roderigue Hortalez chartered their own vessels, and enrolled a crew. The cargoes were worth several millions, and as the firm wanted to

assure the safe arrival and distribution of the goods, the Comte Vergennes was approached, and gave his permission to enlist French officers ready to volunteer in America. Three vessels left the port of Havre, avoided the English vessels on the high seas, and were cheered by the Americans when they landed.

While he was indefatigably active on behalf of America, Beaumarchais arranged for the Council of State to reconsider his sentence, depriving him of his civil liberty. The contractor to the United States of America, the secret agent of the King of France and his ministers, did not believe that it would be necessary for him to bother with the State Councillors. Comte de Maurepas had assured him that his sentence would be quashed, and Beaumarchais was too busy to find out exactly what Maurepas was doing on his behalf. Could a man, whose house consisted of offices from floor to attic, who had stocks in every French port, who was negotiating with contractors and shipowners, waste his time on State Councillors, who had ceased to be important? As he had done at the height of his career, he drove quickly to Versailles every morning, but instead of ingratiating himself with princesses, he now charmed ministers. He paid his respects to the Comte de Maurepas and Comte Vergennes, taking one new *Mémoire* after another from the pocket of his coat. On one day he would report on the international political situation, on another he passed on messages he had received from his agents. He spread out his documents on the ministers' ornate desks, he discussed and revised his plans. He was the acknowledged adviser to the Government. Until his sentence had been repealed, he could not, however, be given a title or an office. But soon, so Maurepas had assured this amusing adviser, his honour would be completely vindicated.

Beaumarchais was a genius and not an ordinary adventurer. Though his actions were not always prompted by inspiration, for he

worked hard, he was conscientious; and he was tenacious in the execution of his plans.

Even as a merchant Beaumarchais was always imaginative. He had organised this huge contract-business, and he did more than a professional business man who was only a business man could have accomplished. His accounts were correct, but they were written in such fine phrases that the verse, as it were, disguised the figures.

His agreement with the Americans stipulated that they were to send him goods worth as much as those he had exported to them. Beaumarchais' ships, however, sailed back to French ports without cargoes. He had already delivered at American ports three million *livres*' worth of cannons, blankets, uniform coats and trousers, rifles and gunpowder, and no colonial products had been shipped to him in return. After he had spent the two million placed at his disposal by the Spanish and French Courts, he had bought on credit. He had overdrawn his credit account. He consulted Mr. Lee and Mr. Deane, the representatives of Congress, who had come to Paris in the meantime. They advised him to communicate with Congress direct.

The gentlemen in Philadelphia who read Beaumarchais' letters were convinced that these flowery messages must be from a Government official without much business experience, and that under the assumed name of Roderigue Hortalez and Company, he was really acting on behalf of the French Government. The Americans believed that these curious covering letters and reminders had been written by a civil servant.

Philadelphia merchants were accustomed to methodical bills, and they were equally used to paying these bills. When they read Beaumarchais' spirited and philosophical observations, they overlooked the sums noted in the margin, and concluded that there was nothing to pay. Heartfelt thanks seemed the proper reply to a man who wrote that "he wanted to serve America as though this were his own country, and that the friendship of a noble people would be

his reward for the task he had been happy to perform." The tobacco, the indigo, the sugar, and the other goods eagerly expected by Roderigue Hortalez and Company remained in the colonies, now the United States of America.

Nevertheless, Beaumarchais rummaged in the warehouses of the barracks, and in the storerooms of French merchants and procured more and more goods for America. He travelled from port to port; he armed the merchant-vessels which he had purchased or chartered with guns. He did not neglect any of the duties of a conscientious merchant—he was still following his patron, Duverney's advice—except that the old financier had obtained securities for his deliveries before he made them.

Once more, Beaumarchais' wealth, which he had acquired overnight, threatened to burst like a bubble. Occasionally, modest creditors had appeared at the house in the rue de Condé. Now men with huge and insistent demands came daily to his new offices. The sums they asked were in seven figures. Besides, Beaumarchais was financially responsible, not only for his family, but for the staff of Roderigue Hortalez and Company as well. There was young de Francys, a nephew of Morande (who can still doubt Beaumarchais' close connections with Morande, the blackmailer, as he took the first opportunity to employ his nephew as his confidential clerk ?); there was his own nephew, and innumerable clerks, store-room attendants, messengers, couriers, sailors and sea captains, and finally, officers and engineers, whom he had recruited for the American Army. He had promised these men mountains of gold, and he could not give them copper coins. He could not expect the Government's help, as his agreement with the minister provided that Beaumarchais was responsible for the business which he had planned and founded. He wrote urgent letters to America. Again in vain, for in the meantime the American representatives, Mr. Lee and Mr. Deane, had quarrelled, and Beaumarchais had sided with Mr. Deane. Lee had therefore sent unfavourable reports

about Beaumarchais to Philadelphia. He had explained, furthermore, that the demands of Roderigue Hortalez and Company were unjustified, as the war materials, and the money needed to buy them, had been supplied to this firm by the French Government, which did not expect financial returns.

When business men see a reason for not paying their debts, they are glad not to do so. Lee's letters strengthened the opinion of Congress, which had no money, that no return deliveries need be made to Roderigue Hortalez and Company for the equipment received.

At this critical time the State Council, instructed by the Comte de Maurepas to quash the sentence against Beaumarchais, did not do so, but declared it to be valid.

Beaumarchais received this news in Bordeaux, where he was assembling shipments and chartering vessels. He went at once to Versailles, where he was received by Maurepas without delay. "While I am carrying on the King's business at the outposts of his country, my personal affairs are being ruined!"—The Count had forgotten Beaumarchais' reinstatement, but why should an omnipotent minister care whether a sentence is quashed or not? He calmed his excited visitor: "This mistake will be rectified."

Actually, a letter from Maurepas to the President of the Paris Parliament was sufficient. Maurepas wrote that this case could not be postponed. Monsieur de Beaumarchais must immediately be reinstated in the name of the King, as he must leave Versailles on an official journey.

A few weeks after Maurepas wrote this letter, Beaumarchais' carriage stopped before the gates decorated with gold of the Palais de Justice. Beaumarchais had dressed with exaggerated simplicity, and his face was made up to make him look pale. His only ornament was the huge diamond which Maria Theresa had given him as a compensation for his enforced stay in Vienna. The great assembly room was crowded. Paris expected a sensation. Target, the only

lawyer, who had never acted as counsel in the Maupeou Parliament, "Target the Virgin," defended Beaumarchais.

In his defence, addressing the Parliamentary Councillors, whose enemies and substitutes had condemned Beaumarchais, Target spoke at greater length about the judges who were to reinstate the accused than about Beaumarchais himself. Target pointed out that their cause was his, that the sympathy which people had felt for this man whose civil honour had been condemned to death in his fight against the Maupeou Parliament, reflected the sympathy which they had inspired in the people while they were still in the Parliament. Besides, the case against Beaumarchais was illegal. The dismissed Parliament had really defended its own honour, and no reasons had been given for Beaumarchais' conviction.

While the lawyer spoke Beaumarchais stood modestly in the background. He still feared that some unexpected incident might postpone his rehabilitation, and this caused him to relive the first painful trial. He remembered how, completely broken, he had left the Court to seek refuge in his sister's home. But while these compelling memories possessed and frightened him, the Senate, without retiring, declared that "his status was to be the same" as it had been before he was sentenced by the Maupeou Parliament.

He was resurrected as a citizen. The cheers from those present in the assembly room made Beaumarchais realise that he was again "Lieutenant-General of the Royal Hunts," and a "Secretary of the King." He was not, however, entirely reinstated. For the final decision in his lawsuit against the Comte de la Blache had not yet been cleared up. The accusation that Beaumarchais was a forger had to be withdrawn. Not until then would he be free and in a position fully to accept the respect now publicly shown him.

CHAPTER II

THOUGH Beaumarchais was reinstated, he was still looked upon with suspicion. People who were antagonistic towards him read the *Mémoires* which Goezmann and his friends had written against him. By slightly twisting their meaning, Beaumarchais' enemies could easily question his integrity. Rivals, who envied him his contract-business with America, tried to influence the Comte Vergennes against him. Most of these attacks were anonymous, and the minister found them distasteful. A letter from a Dr. Dubourg, a friend of the great Benjamin Franklin, is typical of this unfriendly attitude towards Beaumarchais. Dubourg, whose puritanism was outraged, was indignant about Beaumarchais' private life: "He loves luxury," Dubourg wrote; "it is said that he keeps several girls, and finally he is a profiteer." Dubourg went on to say that other men would be better suited as administrators of this large business. The writer then expressed his surprise that the minister had entrusted Beaumarchais with the important task of fixing prices, signing contracts, and shipping goods.

Instead of answering this letter Vergennes sent it to Beaumarchais, who, secure in his position, wrote humorously to Dubourg: "What has it to do with my business affairs that I am sociable and keep several girls? I might add that the girls whom I have been supporting for twenty years are your most obedient servants. There were five of them, four sisters and one niece. Much to my regret two of these splendid girls died two years ago. So I am supporting only three, two sisters and one niece—quite a luxury for a private individual. What will you say when you learn that I am supporting men as well? I am keeping two young and very handsome nephews, and apart from them the father of the dissolute man you mention. Three years ago laces and embroidered coats did not satisfy my vanity; now my wrists are ornamented with fine

smooth muslin; the best black cloth is none too good for me. Occasionally, when it is hot, I am foppish enough to wear silk. But I beg of you, *monsieur le docteur*, not to mention this to the Comte Vergennes. If you did so you would ruin me in his eyes."

This gay reply reflected Comte Vergennes' confidence in Beaumarchais. It also showed that he was in a cheerful frame of mind, and that he was living most comfortably. His family idolised him, and he enjoyed the luxuries of his home.

His quiet mistress, who had been his moral support after the Goezmann case, and who was known in society, where she appeared as Beaumarchais' official mistress, as Madame de Villers, knew that she would be a mother. He was inclined to marry her at once, but his superstitious fears held him back. He wanted the child, wanted to be sure that he would be a father before he married, for he was afraid that the beloved woman and the child might die in childbirth, as his wife Geneviève had died. For though he appeared to be a cynic, he was sentimental at heart.

For the first time, in his emotional reactions, Beaumarchais did not follow the fashions of the day. While he was living his family idyll in the Hôtel de Hollande, Marie Antoinette's gay fêtes were beginning. The young Queen had surrounded herself with a group of frivolous aristocrats, and in a few years, in her unrestrained desire for amusement, she had spent sums larger than those wasted by the late King's mistresses. Actually she did not use so much money for herself, but her new men and women friends exploited her need for "small feminine triumphs" and the nervous restlessness caused by her frustration. "For fifteen years, to be a Queen, meant for Marie Antoinette to be admired as the best-dressed, the most coquettish, spoiled, and above all as the gayest woman at the Court. She was the *arbiter elegantiarum* for this effete aristocratic society which was her world. For twenty years, on her private stage in Versailles, built over an abyss like a Japanese flower bridge, she

acted the rôle of a *prima donna*. She was in love with herself and her part as the perfect and graceful rococo queen."

No one was admitted to Marie Antoinette's exclusive circles who did not have nine notches in the crown over his or her coat of arms. And the Queen and her favourites were exclusive even towards other aristocrats. The ability to invent original amusements, and not superior merit, made men and women eligible for the Queen's intimate entourage.

Beaumarchais was occupied with his serious work, and he never tried to gain admittance to this circle. He was absorbed by his far-reaching business interests; he followed political events in order to advise the ministers, and he would not have enjoyed the silly games of the Trianon.

He managed his household himself. His guests changed according to his business of the moment. When provincial merchants, who had supplied Roderigue Hortalez and Company with goods, visited this luxurious home, they did not question their host's solvency. They saw that Beaumarchais had his own carriage in his stables as well as hunters, carts, and riding horses for each member of his family. A steward welcomed the guests; rows of liveried servants stood at both sides of the door when they arrived.

The Hôtel de Hollande resembled the home of a *grand seigneur*. Beaumarchais, who had acquired and not inherited his wealth, had copies of the damask tapestries he had seen in the reception rooms of counts and princes. His dining-room was not as large as those in princely palaces, but its design was similar, though on a smaller scale. Beaumarchais' aristocratic guests were at home in this dining-room without feeling that their host was a *parvenu*; and the simple citizens invited to the Hôtel de Hollande were impressed by the great Monsieur de Beaumarchais' splendid mansion.

Parasites were allowed to come on days when no important

business guests were invited. As Beaumarchais had done in his youth, these hangers-on, for a good meal, were prepared to spread rumours for him in the theatres, to build up or ruin a man's reputation. They were the *flâneurs* from the Palais Royal; actors who played small parts, and who repeated to Beaumarchais the gossip of the dressing-rooms; printers and distant relatives, who admired their successful cousin. Though he received such a heterogeneous group of people in his home, Beaumarchais was never able to turn his reception room into a *salon*, a regular meeting-place for friends who discussed politics and literature, and whose influence on politics and literature reflected credit on their host.

It was not Beaumarchais' fault that he had no *salon*. The *salons* were gradually going out of fashion. The great eighteenth-century generation of poets and thinkers was growing old. Voltaire had found a new home in the solitude of Ferney, and he maintained his connections with the world by his pen alone. After Louis XV's death he could have lived peacefully in Paris, but the old man preferred to judge and condemn his age at a distance; it no longer attracted him to defend his personal position and to quarrel about his rank as the "King of Literature" with some insignificant aristocrat at the Court. His work was done, and the influence of his writings, as well as of Rousseau's and the Encyclopedists', had increased.

Every great generation of writers is followed by a period of literary depression. Diderot and Chamfort, Sedaine and Marmontel, Jean-Jacques' and Voltaire's best-known contemporaries, were still alive, but they only demonstrated the complete mediocrity of the epigones. The theatres no longer produced real art. Light novels, written to amuse, and playfully handling serious themes, followed Voltaire's critical tales and the important *Confessions* of Rousseau. The heroic age of the Encyclopedists seemed at an end.

Beaumarchais believed that literature could be stimulated and made fruitful only if talented authors were offered a livelihood. As

it was, they were dependent on the moods of wealthy aristocrats, who gave them occasional gifts of money or a pension.

The unbearable plight of writers had often been commented upon humorously. The dramatists' situation was the most difficult. Even Voltaire could not have lived on what he earned from his plays; for the largest theatre in France, the *Comédie française*, paid royalties to authors on only a few performances. Nevertheless, Voltaire had given the *Comédie française* his plays without a royalty, for he wanted to be sure that each of them was performed. His private means made this generous gesture possible, and his vanity was satisfied when his plays were produced. He had no wish to spoil his chances with those who were omnipotent in the theatrical world.

The actors of the *Comédie française* were actually omnipotent. The theatre was administered on a co-operative basis. The profits were equally divided among the actors and the actresses, and they chose their plays. On an average, they made about eight or nine hundred thousand *livres* a year, while hardly forty thousand *livres* were paid to all the authors together. An old law strengthened the actors' position. According to this law royalties were not paid by the *Comédie française* on a play when the royalties, on one day, were below a certain minimum. It was simple to arrange matters so that on one day the box-office receipts for even popular plays were less than this sum: the actors produced a play on an evening when there was another important social event, for then the theatre was deserted and the cash-box remained empty.

After the twenty-third performance of *The Barber of Seville*, the actors of the *Comédie française* announced the play for an evening on which there was to be a play in Versailles. If, on that particular night, the box-office receipts were below the sum fixed, the total profits would henceforth belong to the actors of the *Comédie française* and not to the author of *The Barber of Seville*. Beaumarchais objected to the performance of his play on that evening.

His protest was not prompted by financial considerations. His business was flourishing, though he had not received his return shipments from America. He had exploited his important commercial connections in France to build up his domestic as well as his foreign trade. To prove that he did not care about the money, he declared that he would distribute his royalties on *The Barber of Seville* among the poor. Hunger revolts were no longer unusual. Starving men and women were seen more and more often in the streets of Paris, but that was not why Beaumarchais wanted to help the poor. He had determined to begin a new fight, and he did not want it said that he was guided by selfish motives.

Beaumarchais made a successful protest against a performance of his *Barber of Seville* on an evening when the first night of a fashionable play had been arranged in Versailles. *The Barber of Seville* was not given, but it was not announced for the next day either. The actors hoped to get the better of the author by starving his ambition, as they could not do so by holding back his royalties.

They had not counted on Beaumarchais' determination, for he at once demanded the accrued accounts of *The Barber of Seville*.

It was one of the hundred letters he wrote and signed in the course of a day. He forgot to remind the actors that they had not answered it. He was an author by avocation, and he had no intention of wasting the precious time he needed for his business. He burdened his mind only with business or political letters. He might have neglected to settle his accounts with the actors if the old Duc de Richelieu had not spoken to him about it in the Hall of Mirrors in Versailles.

Richelieu was almost eighty, but as the First Lord Chamberlain he was responsible for all the French theatres. He ignored this duty, however, except when "he wanted to find actresses for his senile amorous adventures." "The King's First Nobleman," the Due de Duras, shared this office with Richelieu. He was said to be one of the most weak-minded courtiers in Versailles. He was like

his father, to whom Louis XV once said reproachfully: "Monsieur de Duras, the moon is not shining to-day."—"Sire," the Duke answered, "I'll send for him at once."

Richelieu had enjoyed this world: he had been very much spoiled during his life, but he was vain and he longed to be famous when he was in the next. He therefore thought it wise to be on good terms with writers and philosophers (for they, after all, would create his fame). He instructed Beaumarchais to take up the question of royalties, for it was annoying writers as a whole.

Richelieu dared not intervene himself. He was a real courtier, and he assumed that the actors were as afraid of the most violent pamphleteer as he was himself. Richelieu hoped to quieten the professional pamphleteers, who had again taken up this unpleasant question of royalties, by appointing Beaumarchais as his representative to oppose them.

Richelieu, the King of love of the eighteenth century, had chosen well. Beaumarchais was the only author affected by the royalty regulations whose wealth made him financially independent. Besides, the author of *The Barber of Seville* agreed with Richelieu that it would be better to threaten the actors with the application of forceful methods than to use force at once. During the first interview, one of the actors asked Beaumarchais whether he would not let the *Comédie française* give *The Barber of Seville* without paying him royalties. Beaumarchais replied: "I will give you this play if I feel like it, and not if I don't feel like it. But this has nothing to do with our old accounts. A gift is not fully appreciated until its value is known." He told the actors that the abuse of their privileges must stop. "What mania causes you to appoint yourselves as the heirs of men who are still alive? As my play will not be yours until the profits are very small, you should hope that it will never belong to you. Are eight-ninths of a hundred *louis* not more valuable than nine-ninths of fifty?"

Beaumarchais had learned that diplomatic victories cannot be

forced. He therefore explained his point of view to the actors without insisting on an immediate decision. Besides, he was worried about the American deliveries, which had become more problematical because Lord Stormont was suspicious. The letters concerning his royalties disappeared into a drawer of his massive desk.

Lord Stormont had sent spies to every French port, and he protested because war materials were being shipped to the American Congress. In Versailles his protests were officially invalidated, and he was told that the cargoes were not going to America, but to the French colonies. But this explanation did not allay his mistrust. Beaumarchais had to work more cautiously than ever before.

A letter from Silas Deane to the secret committee of Congress of the twenty-ninth of November, 1776, shows how well Beaumarchais was performing his arduous task. "I should never have fulfilled my mission without the tireless, generous, and understanding help of Monsieur de Beaumarchais, to whom in every way the United States owe more gratitude than they do to anyone else across the seas. He has advanced money on the payments of munitions, clothing, equipment, and other materials, and it is my opinion that you should make return deliveries to him as soon as possible."

When Beaumarchais showed Vergennes this letter, the Count agreed to give him another million from the State Treasury. Though Beaumarchais' letter to America had remained unanswered, and he had not been informed that his ships had arrived, he sent two more vessels laden with war materials. He also continued to recruit French officers, for he wanted to be sure that the goods shipped, which were worth five million *livres*, would be properly used by the rebels, and that the Americans, who were now armed and clothed, would be properly led into battle. Beaumarchais had read in various reports that the volunteers in the American Army were a mass of untrained, primitive fighters, and he felt that they should be taught the discipline of European armies. Apart from French officers, who had left the service and volunteered in America,

Beaumarchais recruited a German colonel, an adjutant of Frederick the Great. The young man who saw no future for himself in Prussia after the Seven Years' War, had asked someone to approach Roderigue Hortalez and Company, for he hoped to serve as a general with the American forces. He asked for two hundred *louisdors* to pay for his passage. This small sum meant nothing to such a large firm.

Baron von Steuben sailed on the merchant vessel *Flamande*, which belonged to Roderigue Hortalez and Company. Morande's nephew, de Francys, was on the same ship. Beaumarchais was sending him to America to discuss his just demands with Congress, and to see that return shipments were made. It was a most unfortunate time for de Francys' visit, and he was unsuccessful.

Beaumarchais was not aware that the Army of General George Washington, the Commander-in-Chief of the American Forces, was in a desperate plight. When, for instance, Washington's Adjutant-General wanted to send a report to the recently appointed Minister of War of the United States, he did not have six cents to pay for the postage. Neither the Adjutant-General, nor the Commander-in-Chief, nor the men could supply this tiny sum. It is possible that the officers and men, who had learned wisdom through unfortunate experiences, were not inclined to lend this ridiculously small amount to the new United States.

Some of Washington's letters written at this time still exist. He was not sure that he would be able to increase the cavalry to a thousand, because the exchequer was completely exhausted and money for the most urgent necessities was lacking. Washington, deeply moved by this desperate situation, wondered whether, in the future, anyone would believe that a people fighting for their human rights had equipped their soldiers so badly that the most necessary objects needed by a soldier were not available. Washington compared the new country with a merchant who has gone bankrupt, who is too poor to undertake any great venture, and too proud to

perform the trivial tasks which he might accomplish. But, so Washington assured his correspondent, their high aim was driving these fighters on, and he did not want the poverty of the United States to appear in more unpleasant colours than it really was.

Beaumarchais did not see Washington's letter, but as the most important contractor to the United States he might have complained in the same words used by the penniless general of the army fighting for American independence. Despite their despair, however, both men remained optimistic. Washington carried on because he had undertaken the task of carrying on. Toughness was, at the time, his outstanding characteristic. For with his small army he could not have been a great strategist. He held his own in a series of unimportant skirmishes, in which he led his heterogeneous army, and his forceful optimism did not waver when he met with defeat. His experiences in the guerrilla warfare against the French colonists had taught him again and again to resist the regular English forces consisting of the paid troops from Hesse-Cassel, even when he had recently been defeated.

Beaumarchais, the army contractor, was conducting a similar guerrilla warfare against the great financiers of France, who had given him credit. He had been expecting the shipments of tobacco from Virginia and Maryland. They did not arrive. His situation was as hopeless as that of the American Army, which he was steadfastly providing with materials of war. He only wrote: "My means and my credit are at an end. I counted too definitely on the return shipments, and for this reason I have overdrawn my own accounts and those of my friends. I have also exhausted other powerful financial sources, which were accessible to me because I definitely promised to pay back these loans quickly."

It was a miserable letter. But Beaumarchais was not depressed. He knew that his friend Mr. Lee had gone to Spain to negotiate for a loan of two million pounds for Congress. If Lee succeeded, Roderigue Hortalez and Company's demands for return freights as

well as for cash payments would be met. In the meantime he was defraying Silas Deane's living expenses, and he hoped that his friendly relations with this representative of Congress would finally result in the payments due to him. Besides, he had been informed that another emissary from the United States, Mr. Benjamin Franklin, was expected. Beaumarchais believed that this famous inventor of the lightning conductor, this man who, on his own initiative, had risen from a printer's apprentice and was now one of the leaders of his people, this "honest man," would not leave his unselfish efforts and achievements for the War of Independence unrewarded.

Mr. Benjamin Franklin was an unusual Ambassador, for he wore a plain coat. When he arrived in Versailles he was astonished at the imposing dress and curious demeanour of the ladies and gentlemen at the Court. They seemed to him like overdressed monkeys. This simple man wondered whether he would be able to adjust himself to this scented atmosphere. "Imagine an old man whose grey hair is visible under a marten-skin cap, walking about amongst the powdered heads of Paris. . . ." Mr. Benjamin Franklin had not expected the mad desire for every novelty which enlivened the atmosphere of Versailles. The amusements of the Court were meaningless. People were really bored. "The most surprising thing was the contrast between the luxury of our capital, the elegance of our fashions, the magnificence of Versailles, the living reminders of Louis XVI's mode of life, the polite but arrogant haughtiness of our important men—and Benjamin Franklin. His clothing was almost like a peasant's, his bearing was simple but dignified, his language was natural, his hair was unpowdered. It was as though classic simplicity, the figure of a thinker of the time of Plato, or a Republican of Cato's or Fabius' age, had suddenly been brought by magic into our effeminate and slavish age, the eighteenth century. This unexpected visitor charmed us all the more, as he was such a

novelty, and he came at a time when literature and philosophy were propagating a desire for reform, for changes, and for a universal love of liberty."

The Comte de Ségur, who wrote this passage, expressed the mood which prevailed in France when Mr. Benjamin Franklin arrived. This man, coming from the wilderness, and sent by a people which had conquered the primeval forest and had fought against France's enemy, the King of England, created a sensation in Versailles. Mr. Benjamin Franklin had never considered the fashions; he was very much surprised when fashionable tailors made suits *à la Franklin*. The men fighting for their independence, whom he represented as a member of their Congress, men who had no trousers themselves, would have been more surprised if they had seen the fashion designs of the *à l'Américaine* styles.

Neither the ladies nor the gentlemen of the aristocracy, their men and women tailors, nor the Americans themselves knew that this trouserless mode of dress, which the American rebels were forced to adopt, would become the great fashion of the Revolution, of the *Sans-culottes*, who followed the Americans' example.

Rousseau had proclaimed the idea: back to nature. French courtiers pictured the Americans as living according to Rousseau. Their Constitution contained the basic philosophy of his *Contrat Social*. The revolutionary developments which *Monseigneur* and *Madame* would not have welcomed in their own district, but which they acknowledged in their hearts, had apparently been realised by the Americans. To the governing classes in France, it seemed a harmless pleasure to support a new Republic separated by the high seas from the European continent. They approved of supporting the Americans, not only with money as the French Government was doing, or with arms, munitions and uniforms, as Beaumarchais was doing, for soon his business was an open secret. A number of French aristocrats, including some who were unwilling to surrender an iota of their own privileges, volunteered for service in the

Republican Army of America. Words, which later replaced the lily of the Bourbons on public buildings, and meant the destruction of the aristocracy, became popular : “Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité.”

In the *salons* of Versailles the rights of men were enthusiastically discussed, while at the same time the hunger riots organised by the peasants in the Provinces were ruthlessly suppressed. The Marquis de Lafayette’s income from his estates amounted to half a million. His tenant farmers squeezed this sum out of his statute-labourers, whose living standards were lower than those of negro slaves. And yet Lafayette equipped himself magnificently to help his oppressed brothers in America. Public opinion was intensely pro-American and anti-British, and the people looked forward to the moment of relief when the King would declare war.

Up to the present the French Government had assisted the United States only financially, and this money was now paid directly to Benjamin Franklin, and was not sent through Beaumarchais. It was hoped that these secret subsidies, which amounted to eight million *livres*, would make hostilities unnecessary, for Louis XVI could not make up his mind to declare war.

The English were increasingly irritated by Versailles’ attitude. Trusting in her sea-power, the British Admiralty issued orders to the fleet to stop all French ships sailing towards America and to investigate the cargoes. Secret emissaries from London came to see Franklin and Deane. England wanted peace with America, so that she could immediately take her revenge on France. The Americans, who had developed into masterly diplomats, used these suggestions to force Versailles to recognise their Declaration of Independence. The King still hesitated, though Turgot’s successor Necker, recently appointed as Director of Finances, declared that he could finance a war for two years. To do so, he said, a new tax need not be levied. The news of the Americans’ victory at Saratoga had just been received.

A reconciliation between England and America would have ruined Beaumarchais. He was aware that America must conclude a peace unless France supported the United States openly. Beaumarchais' financial existence was at stake. He alarmed the ministers, trying to accomplish by memoranda what he could not do by talking to them. Beaumarchais, who understood human nature, longed intensely to overcome the King's and the ministers' resistance. To simplify their task, to force them as though by magic to sign a completed document, he drafted the manifesto whereby the King of France acknowledged the independence of the United States of America.

The fact that this historic manifesto was written by the author of comedies is significant of the eighteenth century and of the Versailles Court. Was Beaumarchais' style so convincing; were his arguments so compelling: The Comte de Maurepas and Comte Vergennes persuaded the King to sign Beaumarchais' document.

This signature confirmed the fact that the King of France had officially recognised the independence of the United States of America.

The manifesto meant war. Lord Stormont, the British Ambassador in Versailles, was recalled. Hostilities had begun.

The naval war was being waged everywhere. Beaumarchais, too, had equipped a man-of-war. The *Fier Roderigue*, armed with sixty cannons, was to protect his own merchant fleet, which, laden with war materials, had sailed for America shortly after the outbreak of the war.

Beaumarchais was extremely agitated whenever his reloaded ships had sailed. He waited impatiently to hear that the goods had arrived or had been lost on the high seas.

He craved activity while he waited for news and while his financial existence hung in the balance. His business alone was not enough to occupy him during these restless months. He had helped to bring about the war, but he was not capable of calmly

awaiting the outcome. More and more he needed diversions. He had love affairs with women of doubtful reputation, he played cards, and he speculated frequently, hoping to make the firm of Roderigue Hortalez and Company independent of the vicissitudes of war.

Nothing he did quietened him. He fled to his desk. And, as always during a crisis, writing made him feel less depressed.

Would he be able to create a main character out of Figaro, who had been a versatile though subordinate figure in *The Barber of Seville*?

Beaumarchais wrote only during his free time. New business plans, distinct from his previous ventures, were occupying him. He thought of collecting Voltaire's works into one edition, of buying a printing plant, a paper factory and a bookshop, and of becoming a publisher. He also resumed negotiations with the actors of the *Comédie française*.

The treasurer of the *Comédie française*, who brought Beaumarchais five thousand four hundred *livres* of accrued royalties for his *Barber of Seville*, thought that the author would be completely satisfied. Beaumarchais, however, was in a business-like mood. He did not consider the matter as an author, but as a business man. Unless he was given a statement of his accounts, he said, he would not accept this sum, and thus admit that he was satisfied with the financial administration of the *Comédie française*. The treasurer declared that only a rough estimate of the accounts would be available. But the author replied: "I demand more than money. I demand an exact statement, which is to be the basis for all future settlements between authors and actors."—"You want to quarrel with us?"—"On the contrary, I want to reconcile the two parties."

When the treasurer had left, Beaumarchais sat down at his desk and wrote a letter determining the rights of the actors and the playwrights once and for all. He received no answer, and again he might have forgotten this affair, which was relatively unimportant to him, if he had not heard rumours. It was said in Paris that he

intended to involve the *Comédie française* in a case similar to the Goezmann affair. He imagined the actors' excitement, how they would argue for and against a settlement with him, and he wrote a spirited letter. He said that, after his important and tragic lawsuit, he had no desire to be involved in a small and comic fight. The case began to amuse him. As the actors had refused to give him a statement, he asked them to let him see their accounts so that he could ascertain by himself what royalties they owed him. "The matter is urgent," he wrote, "for if it is not settled soon, the poor, amongst whom I am distributing these royalties, will die of the cold!"

Finally a statement was sent to Beaumarchais, but it was unsigned. Beaumarchais refused to accept it. Then the *comédiens* said that they would verbally answer any questions he cared to ask. Beaumarchais replied that he would go to court if the matter was not satisfactorily settled within a week. Before the end of the week he had an invitation from Monsieur de Duras. The aristocrat urged him to settle the case by peaceful means, and to draft new royalty regulations so that disputes would be avoided in the future.

That would have meant too much work for Beaumarchais. He was one of the few authors in France who could truthfully say that he wrote only for his own amusement. He suggested that dramatists should found a society, and that the States-General of Writers was to represent the point of view of the united authors against the united actors of the *Comédie française*.

Heretofore Beaumarchais' meetings with other authors had been rare and casual. Gudin was his only friend among them. Beaumarchais had occasionally met writers in the drawing-rooms he frequented, but this contact had remained superficial. He knew that the literary world objected to his versatility. Despite his *Mémoires*, his *Barber of Seville*, he was considered a courtier, who happened to write plays, or a speculator, who, in his spare time, was a gifted dilettante. He had always hoped to know some of the

authors of his age, and it seemed as though the Duc de Duras orders would make this possible. Beaumarchais had not, however, remembered that the profession of writing makes men individualistic. His own verse was spontaneous, the humour of his plays was taken directly from life; he did not live in order to write; on the contrary, he wrote because he was alive. He could adjust himself to other human beings, could imagine the part other men were playing in the world; ideas came to him quickly, it was not necessary for him to think them out slowly. His mind had been stimulated by his versatile career, he was not shy in conversation. He was never embarrassed. Most of the writers to whom he turned were crushed by petty cares; they were struggling from day to day, and their poverty and disappointments had made them bitter and lonely. The few, on the other hand, who had overcome their worst difficulties, were tired of fighting; they had no desire to become involved in a dispute which might endanger the position they had acquired with such an effort. After all, the actors of the *Comédie française* were by tradition omnipotent in the theatre. What if, under compulsion, they accepted new royalty regulations, but then refused to perform plays by the authors who had forced them to adopt these measures?

The prominent writers did not come to Beaumarchais' home in response to his circular letter. Diderot explained his absence by saying that it was easier to deal with a parliament than with actors. Collé was wealthy, and he could therefore admit that he despised the *comédiens* so much that he did not wish to see them or have anything to do with them.

A few of the authors accepted Beaumarchais' invitation with flattering words, but he found no real friends among them. The men who came to his house were embarrassed. They were poor, and their host, who thought himself one of them, lived like a *grand seigneur*. Was he being ironical towards them? The meal he offered them cost more than their royalties for a year, and yet he

felt called upon to defend their interests in the question of royalties. They did not trust Beaumarchais. His hospitality seemed to conceal some unknown intrigue. What office at Court was he hoping to get ? Why did he write, as he was obviously rich and did not need the profits from his works ? He explained. "I am probably the least gifted amongst you, but I am the wealthiest, and I thought therefore that I should be active on your behalf." This remark did not make his guests less suspicious, although they agreed with what he said. He had said : "Every rightful-owned property is passed on untouched from fathers and great-grandfathers to sons and great-grandsons. No one says to a man that the acres, paintings, or sculptures which his father left him do not belong to him." Why should intellectual values be treated differently, for, after all, they belong to the author more unconditionally than the property a man inherits from his father ?

Beaumarchais spoke the truth, but the authors continued to mistrust the intentions of this merchant and courtier ; they thought he might be in league with the *Comédie française*. They did not, however, venture to express their suspicions, any more than the actors dared continue this battle with him. "If Beaumarchais demanded half my fortune," men humorously remarked at the time, "and threatened to write *Mémoires* against me if I refused, I would at once give him my entire fortune !"

A memorandum written by this dangerous man was finally signed by all the authors. Richelieu and Duras, who read this *Mémoire*, and the King, who had been informed about this matter, feared that the publication of this manuscript would rouse a storm of indignation as great as the agitation felt about the Goezmann case. The situation was discussed, and Beaumarchais was invited to listen to counter-proposals ; but his patience was exhausted. He had ceased to be cheerful. He could no longer master the difficulties connected with his American business. No money, no answer to his letters, no return shipments had come from the United States.

He could not simply close the "American case" because business was at a standstill; he longed, therefore, at least to settle the business connected with his amusement.

His influence was great, and he could carry out his intentions. The State Council acknowledged the just demands of the dramatic authors, and passed a law according to which they were henceforth to receive one-seventh of the box-office receipts of their plays. The principle that royalties could lapse while the author was alive was declared null and void.

CHAPTER III

DURING this period of waiting, interrupted from time to time by some fortunate or unfortunate event, Beaumarchais was chasing the morrow with youthful optimism. But he began to realise that he was no longer young. Time had passed. As usual, he had been trying to make it pass more quickly, he had waited impatiently for certain dates. Now he suddenly wished that he could stop the hands of the clock. He would have liked to discard the various parts he had played during his career and to be simply a human being : Pierre Augustin. He was tired of being constantly on the alert, of being watched by others.

His father was dying on the first floor of the Hôtel de Hollande. Separated from him by a few rooms lived Theresa, who had given birth to a girl. Beaumarchais loved his little daughter Eugénie tenderly, but his affection for her mother had wavered. Quiet, motherly Theresa, an excellent housewife, no longer satisfied his restless temperament. The fine layer of powder on his curly hair concealed his strands of white hair. He did not look old, but he felt that he was ageing. To hide this fact he walked with springy steps. He wore different clothes for his various professions, but in each of these costumes he assumed the pose most trying for even a man with great adaptability : the youthfulness of a man who is really growing old.

He hoped that he did not look forty-seven. His popularity with women had furthered his career. He had not risen in the world only because he was a “favourite” with them, but he measured his own position in life by his success with them. Unexpectedly he became passionately attached to a woman of the *demi-monde*.

His father died. Pierre Augustin was deeply moved by the old man’s death, though he passed away peacefully. Apart from filial affection, he had felt a sincere friendship for the old watchmaker.

Again and again his father's directness had clarified his own intricate mental processes. Monsieur André-Charles Caron, who had never used his son's aristocratic name, had always been for him an example of magnificent simplicity. The last generation of honest bourgeois, of proud craftsmen, who were content with their position in life, had died with old Caron. Beaumarchais' own uneasiness reflected the tormenting restlessness of his age. Or did his turbulent nature indicate that in this as well as other ways Beaumarchais was ahead of his time?

Hours passed too quickly because they made him older; the days passed too slowly because he was waiting for decisions from America, for messages from the seat of war, for the reports which were essential to his business. He eagerly read the post which brought him business letters each morning, as well as letters from his new mistress. He wrote to her with exaggerated youthfulness. He was afraid to write too little and so he wrote too much. He wanted this charming and intriguing woman to know that Pierre Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais was superior to all her past and future lovers. He did not expect her to be faithful to him. Her passion alone was important. In her presence he tried to free himself from his own irrepressible and ungovernable nature. Was that love? Had he ever loved with complete surrender? He had always been a man, and never a human being, with women, and he was fully aware that this had meant a loss. The memory of his own coldness kindled his passion for his new mistress. Was it love after all? He felt that he must assure her and himself in exuberant terms that it was, but he knew nevertheless that only his senses were involved. The remorse, which drove him back to Theresa after every disappointment, showed him how little his soul had to do with this infatuation.

In the winter of 1779 the first letter from America reached the Hôtel de Hollande. De Francys, Morande's nephew, had at least persuaded Congress to write to Beaumarchais.

Congress expressed the United States' appreciation of Beaumarchais' assistance, and assured him of their respect. This letter reflected Congress's regret because Beaumarchais had suffered inconvenience, and explained that unfortunate circumstances made this delay inevitable. Congress promised to pay the United States' debts to Beaumarchais as soon as possible.

Then the letter went on to praise his far-sightedness and his talents. Congress mentioned that "he had deserved the recognition of the New World," and the letter was signed "John Jay," but Beaumarchais was not sure whether this document promised financial returns as well as moral appreciation. Would he be paid by the United States? His friend, Mr. Silas Deane, had been summoned to Philadelphia to report to Congress, but he was being attacked by Lee and his friends. By defending Beaumarchais Deane defended his own position. He discredited the unfavourable rumours about Beaumarchais at the Court of Louis XVI. Deane showed the members of Congress a portrait of the French King which the monarch had given to him as a parting gift. Besides, Congress could not ignore the letters from the Comte Vergennes—so it was true that Beaumarchais and Deane had rendered the most outstanding services to the young Republic? Shortly afterwards, Gerard, Vergennes' chief assistant at the French Ministry for Foreign Affairs, arrived in Philadelphia as the Minister Plenipotentiary from France. His attitude towards Deane proved to the assembled members of Congress that Deane and not Lee had been accepted as the accredited representative of Congress by the French Government. Gerard reported these developments to Comte Vergennes. Gerard's diplomatic correspondence indicates that he opposed Lee and his brother partly because they represented the British point of view. Gerard claimed that Mr. Arthur Lee's statements in Congress were a tissue of lies. Gerard wrote that he had arrived in Philadelphia just in time to prevent this wicked and dangerous man from succeeding honest Benjamin Franklin as the American Minister

Plenipotentiary at the French Court. Gerard also pointed out that Lee would have been responsible for the United States' diplomatic relations with the Spanish Court. Silas Deane was being unjustly attacked. "Men whose services are no longer needed are beginning to be ostracised."

Despite the French Ambassador's moral support, Mr. Deane was in a serious predicament. He lacked Lee's talents as an intriguer. Whatever happened, Lee was able to win the confidence of others. Nevertheless, Deane was loyal to Beaumarchais, and as he could not send him his money, he at least sent a letter saying that Beaumarchais had contributed more than anyone else to the liberation of America, and that he, Deane, would make every effort to see that the just demands of Roderigue Hortalez and Company were met.

Beaumarchais was triumphant. He thought that soon he would have the millions which would give him permanent financial security. He did not keep this document in a round gold box, but one day, when he was talking to the Comte Vergennes, he showed him this letter. It had made Beaumarchais so happy that he failed to notice the minister's displeasure. Beaumarchais was surprised when Vergennes handed back the document without comment. Soon Beaumarchais realised that Vergennes was offended, for he thought that he, and not Beaumarchais, should become famous for his work towards the liberation of America.

Beaumarchais wrote : "The blow had fallen, the document praising me had been read, Vergennes had judged me. To calm the storm I again devoted myself to frivolous theatrical pastimes, and I never mentioned my serious political activities."

Before Beaumarchais had leisure to finish *The Marriage of Figaro* he was able (for he was still sufficiently in favour to do so) to revise his case against la Blache.

The Parliament in Aix would pass judgment. There was no

doubt about the outcome. But when, in this sunny provincial town, Beaumarchais was informed that he had won he was overcome by the memory of his earlier despair about this case, and he fainted.

Though Beaumarchais had decided to give up politics and retire from business, he was indefatigably busy. Yet his intention to "devote himself to frivolous theatrical pastimes" was strengthened by the magic force which seemed to direct his life.

He went to Nantes to inspect goods to be shipped abroad and to arrange for the embarkation of French volunteers who were sailing for America. Despite his incognito he was recognised in the main square at Nantes. It was a sensation for the citizens of the town to know that this famous man, who was also a very important financier, was in Nantes. It was news that "Roderigue Hortalez," this buyer, shipper, and contractor of arms, was Beaumarchais. To show him their respect, the director and the actors of the Nantes Theatre performed *The Barber of Seville* that evening. The merchants who came to the gaily decorated theatre to honour their colleague cheered him loudly before the curtain rose.

Beaumarchais had not seen *The Barber of Seville* on the stage for some time. Whenever clever Figaro appeared, Beaumarchais reconstructed the cues, and in his imagination he placed this nimble character in another situation. In the Nantes theatre he was again charmed by this lackey, who was partly modelled on himself and expressed his own ideas.

When Beaumarchais returned to Paris he regularly put aside his business documents in the evening and wrote. What background should he give his Figaro? The plot must be extremely simple—a pretext for the lackey to act and to speak. "A Spanish Count falls in love with a lady's-maid, whom he wishes to seduce. His plans are frustrated by the joint efforts of his own wife, the lady's-maid,

and her fiancé, though the Count's rank, his fortune, and extravagant generosity make him seem irresistible."

There were to be two camps in this play: that of the aristocratic Count and that of the girl's fiancé, the lackey Figaro. These two men were each to represent their class.

The simplicity of the plot concealed a problem, which was very real at the time. A contemporary, describing lackeys, said that, actually, they were not so unlike their masters. When a lackey is with other lackeys, he usually adopts his master's name, he affects his customs, gestures, and manners. The lackey, too, has a gold watch and wears laces, he is impudent and foppish. If his master is a young gentleman, the servant is his impecunious master's confidant. If occasion arises the lackey is his procurer. He is an unabashed liar when he dismisses creditors, or when he helps his master in an embarrassing situation. These were the functions of an ordinary lackey, but Beaumarchais was not content with these superficial characteristics. He had observed that "these lackeys did more than rise to their masters' level, when they imitated them; beyond that, in knowledge and character they were superior to the men whom they served." These lackeys were typical of the Third Estate, and, in their imagination at any rate, they had overcome the class differences separating them from their masters. This fact had to be explained and dramatised so that the audience would be made conscious of it.

Beaumarchais wanted to present on the stage the humiliations he had suffered, and still suffered, whenever he overstepped the barriers placed round him by the system of society in which he lived. He had learned from his own *Mémoires*. The play could not be bitter or vindictive; instead it must be witty and gay. He accepted the "recipe" of Molière, who had written to the *Roi-soleil* that the best way to attack the mistakes of his century was to ridicule them.

The great ladies and gentlemen, the bourgeois and bourgeoisie,

the lackeys and the little milliners, who were to hear the duel in words between the Count and his servant, must be made to laugh, but this delightful vibration of their diaphragms was to make them thoughtful. Beaumarchais hoped that his audience would memorise the gay passages, and that each spectator would repeat them to his friends. Courtiers were to learn that their very existence was based on three words : “ Receive, take, demand ” ; that all they need do was simply be courtiers. The aristocrats must not be annoyed by his play ; laughing, they were to become aware that they had never accomplished anything but “ to be born.” The cradles of these aristocrats had been decorated with crowns ; he must be witty and not menacing when he told them that the prerogative of birth, to which they owed all their privileges, was no longer accepted as a matter of course by those not favoured by “ the accident of birth.” Everyone in the audience must realise that at their christening the infants, whose Christian names preceded an aristocratic title, were given wealth, exemption from taxation, and prestige. When these children were six or seven years old they were *abbés*, the beneficiaries of ecclesiastical livings ; when they were seven or eight, at an age when they could barely handle wooden swords, they were commanders of regiments. As small boys they were great gentlemen, who considered themselves as illustrious as their famous names. Their ancestry determined their career ; it was not necessary for them to think or to accomplish anything in order to succeed. Later, when with inherited arrogance, in the dignity of their high positions, they sat in judgment on the accused, or commanded regiments or celebrated high mass as Cardinals, they saw no reason why they should consider the masses of the people, who existed at best merely to serve them.

Figaro was to hold a mirror up to them. “ Because you are a fine gentleman you think you are a genius : Noble rank, wealth, and dignities make men proud. And what have you done to merit this splendour ? You made the effort to be born and that is all.

You are a very ordinary fellow, while I, an obscure man in the crowd, required more wit and knowledge to rise in the world than has been invested in recent years in the government of all the Spanish Provinces."

Beaumarchais included incidents from his own life in his comedy. Experience had taught him how much strength it took merely to exist if one was not "well born," while if a "well-born man" or an aristocrat's protégé made a slight effort, he could achieve whatever he wanted. He could stir up wars between continents or world Powers, cause ministries to fall, and, as Beaumarchais, who had seen through the Court and the mighty courtiers, was doing himself, he could enlighten men of his own kind, the class from which he had come, and show them the new road they must follow.

None of these ideas could be directly expressed in his play—the plot must not be serious. The comedy must seem so innocent that no one could doubt the author's harmless intentions. The scenes were to be light, and only those who wanted to find a deeper meaning, or who could not avoid grasping it, were to take the play seriously. Beaumarchais had assiduously collected conversations typical of the various classes of society he had known during recent years, and he had added brief aphorisms to his notes. He had thus compiled a compendium of the period.

He did not presume to write an encyclopedia of customs, but he omitted nothing in his reflections which threw light on the customs of his age. Beaumarchais' *Figaro* expressed in words the material collected by this disillusioned author about aristocratic society. But the Count in the play, too, must not be unpleasant. On the contrary, he must be a good representative of his class, a better character than the various Counts and Marquises whom Beaumarchais had actually known. Such an obvious idealisation of a great gentleman would emphasise the contrast between him and the servant, whose assets of character were not exaggerated but realistically described.

Beaumarchais did not take his task lightly. With the assurance of genius that he was on the right road, with the certainty that his play would be perfect, Beaumarchais did not hurry with his comedy. He knew that if he could make it perfect, it would have lasting value.

At this period in his life, Beaumarchais had very little cause to oppose the Court and the aristocracy. He was playing the part of a wealthy man (which actually he was not) so perfectly that young aristocrats, men about town, who were always short of money, asked his help and repaid the loans with their friendship. Beaumarchais had no illusions about their friendship. One dunning letter, demanding the payment of these rolls of *louisdors*, which these young men had light-heartedly borrowed, would turn these friends into enemies, into haughty despisers of the watchmaker's son. These men, whose memories for their debts were bad, would have excellent memories about his former defamation, and though his honour had been vindicated, they would look down upon him because he had once been in disgrace.

A Prince of Nassau-Siegen was one of Beaumarchais' aristocratic debtors. He was not like most of his class, for he was not indolent, and he considered it a point of honour to do whatever he could for his charming moneylender. Beaumarchais was his friend as well as his banker, and he was a welcome guest at the Prince's house. The Princess, a Pole by birth, "was as fond of him as was the Prince." Beaumarchais was one of their closest friends, and now, when he was writing against the aristocracy, he was being admitted to the most intimate circle of Prince Nassau-Siegen.

As often as he could, Beaumarchais intimated to his aristocratic debtors that he had lent them money because he was their friend. He preferred not to be considered only their banker; instead they were to feel that one *grand seigneur* had helped another. This attitude is

reflected in a letter he wrote about Baron von Steuben to de Francys, his confidential assistant, who was in America. Beaumarchais had lent money to this officer, who had served in Frederick the Great's Army. Steuben was a genius, and he had organised the American volunteers who had been recruited in such a haphazard fashion. "Tell him," Beaumarchais wrote, "that his fame represents the interest on his debt to me, and that I do not doubt for an instant that he will thus pay me usurious interest." Beaumarchais' generous gesture was not entirely free from self-interest. He was never impractical. Steuben's small debt was insignificant as compared with the huge amount he was owed by the Congress of the United States. This large debt would never be paid unless Steuben, Washington's chief assistant, helped the American Army to be victorious.

Beaumarchais' suspense grew from day to day while he waited for news from America. Washington suffered some defeats. But in the end the insurgents' tenaciousness, the settlers' unshakable willingness to sacrifice themselves in this struggle against the regular British Army, would undoubtedly exhaust the mother country. For the war was extremely expensive, and at sea against France England had not been victorious.

"In every Paris *café* enthusiasm is felt for America"—Beaumarchais had been the first Frenchman to support the American cause. His own intuitive understanding of the "Sons of Freedom" made him realise that he was close to the population of Paris, to the people of France. The general rejoicing expressed when the French expeditionary force left for America seemed to confirm Beaumarchais' own historic mission, even though it had been secret, and his efforts had been unknown to the masses. Five thousand men, commanded by the Comte de Rochambeau, sailed for America. "The flowers of the French military aristocracy" had volunteered to fight for "liberty, equality, and fraternity." He, Pierre Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais, had kindled the beacon which would bring

the longed-for light, not only to the New World, but to the Old World as well.

Since his youth he had acted as a mediator between the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie; he was the living example of their *rapprochement*. Now, only some outward impulse was needed to unite them and make them forget their class differences and the fact that they were separated by the accident of birth.

Again and again Beaumarchais' idealistic contemplations were rudely interrupted by reality. He observed that the pendulum of the age was swinging more and more violently from right to left. The aristocrats, amusing themselves in the Trianon, had become extremely exclusive. In the *faubourgs* of Paris, on the other hand, an increasing number of poor men and women, driven to despair by unemployment, poverty, and the burden of taxation, roamed through the streets. These desperate individuals were the nucleus of a huge revolutionary army. Sporadic rioting occurred. Not all of the officers, ordered to disperse the crowds, behaved like young Monsieur de Avelon, who had been instructed to shoot the *canaille*. He lined up his men, and galloping in front of them he waved his hat in one hand, while, in the other, he held up his order to shoot. "Gentlemen," he shouted to the agitated mob, "I have been instructed to shoot the *canaille*. May I ask all orderly people to leave." Many of the officers were not as humane as Monsieur de Avelon. Frequently a smart squadron was ordered to go to a district where crowds had congregated, and then the demonstration was brutally dispersed. The people had reason to be agitated.

Necker, the new Minister of Finance, had published a "statement of accounts," including the expenditures and sources of revenue of the Exchequer, because he hoped to give the impression that Louis XVI's Government had democratic tendencies. Hundreds of thousands of copies of this statement had been distributed within a few weeks. From this statement the population learned that the courtiers, the "drone-bees," had been paid twenty-eight million

livres in one year for doing nothing. People had known that this extravagance existed, but heretofore no figures had been available. Now they read that the enormous sum of twenty-eight million *livres* had been wasted by the upper classes, who paid no taxes, who, in other words, did not contribute to the State, but who were allowed to demand a tenth of the peasants' production, and who, besides, received as a gift a part of the public revenues. Necker had summoned assemblies of the estates in order to curtail the power of the provincial governors and the tax-collectors. The aristocracy at the Court, which was so keen about America's liberty, began to fear that this desire for freedom might infect France. The "swarm of drones" brought about the fall of Necker. Calonne was appointed as his successor. Marie Antoinette and her courtiers began to rob the Exchequer of France. While these significant events were occurring Beaumarchais finished his comedy *The Marriage of Figaro*. He knew how the people would receive Figaro, this veiled symbol of rebellion.

Beaumarchais was a Freemason. Voltaire, too, had recently been admitted to *Les neuf Sœurs* lodge, to which Benjamin Franklin belonged. Current events were discussed at the meetings of these intelligent and liberal-minded men, who were the "poets and thinkers" of French enlightenment, who defended religious freedom, and who opposed injustice. Beaumarchais' association with the revolutionary Freemasons stimulated the private information service which he maintained as a merchant and a friend of the ministers. But he never betrayed to the ministers the secrets of the masonic lodge. He observed the progressive disintegration of the State, but he continued to be on friendly terms with the Comte de Maurepas.

Gudin reports that Maurepas suggested to Beaumarchais that he publish Voltaire's works. "The greatest French writer, the writer

who conformed most perfectly to the French temperament," had left his solitude in Ferney to attend the first performance of his *Irène* at the *Théâtre français*. Beaumarchais called on Voltaire after this eventful evening, and Voltaire dismissed him by saying that his (Voltaire's) hopes were centred on Beaumarchais. Was he referring to Beaumarchais the writer or Beaumarchais the publisher? Gudin, usually so well informed, could not answer this question.

Frederick the Great of Prussia and Catherine II of Russia respected Voltaire as "the greatest philosopher and the greatest poet, as the greatest genius and the greatest man of the century." Catherine had asked Pankoucke, a publisher, to publish the collected works of Voltaire in Russia at her expense. While the great Empress was negotiating with this publisher, the owner of the firm of Roderigue Hortalez and Company called on Pankoucke, who was in financial difficulties. Beaumarchais' cashier waited outside in the carriage. Beaumarchais hoped that a bag containing one hundred and sixty thousand *livres* in gold would persuade the publisher to give him all the printed and handwritten documents which he had industriously collected for decades. Some of this material had come into Pankoucke's hand by good fortune and some he had bought at great expense from Voltaire's niece. The unexpected sum of money was more effective than Beaumarchais' powers of persuasion. The sale was quickly arranged. Beaumarchais added the responsibilities of a publisher to his many professions. When Catherine II heard that her plan had failed, she said that she agreed with "Pankoucke's arrangement."

Beaumarchais was not concerned only with the technical execution of his plan, which demanded great circumspection. Instead of writing he now read. He spent every free hour on Voltaire's works. From the huge bundles of handwritten documents, he selected twenty volumes of letters from "the old man of Ferney." In these letters Beaumarchais saw the "uncrowned King of the Nation" as he actually was: "Courtly and cynical, emotional and

frivolous, heartless and generous, egotistical and self-sacrificing, a diplomat and a pamphleteer, an accuser and an informer, a flatterer and a hostage of the powerful, an intriguer and a noble saviour of those in distress." Beaumarchais decided that future generations could have no better portrait of Voltaire than that which would be presented in these letters. He asked Condorcet to write a biography of Voltaire as an introduction to the collected edition of his works.

In everything he undertook, Beaumarchais craved the approval of influential men, of aristocrats. He therefore read passages from Voltaire's unpublished works in the *salons* of the aristocracy. He wore the latest fashions. He had discarded his wig and his hair was curled and powdered. Whenever he appeared in the brilliant society he frequented he was expected to produce a sensation. Would he again reveal one of Voltaire's incredibly malicious remarks about Frederick the Great, would he read a satire against society, or an attack on the Church? Scented prelates, dukes and counts, decorated with orders, marquises and princesses were in suspense while this clever interpreter opened his embroidered case and began to read one of Voltaire's letters. Before and after reading he entertained the aristocrats with impudent comments. These readings were frequently arranged, and his frivolous and suggestive observations finally caused the Comte Vergennes to request him, in the interests of diplomacy, to postpone the publication of those of Voltaire's letters which were antagonistic towards Frederick the Great. Beaumarchais resented such commands. Through business representatives he had equipped a paper factory in Kehl; he had bought one hundred and fifty thousand *livres*' worth of type from Baskerville, the English type-caster. This large new venture was organised as the *Société typographique*. Beaumarchais did not, of course, have the leisure to supervise each phase of the production of Voltaire's collected works, but whenever he could he asked for the proofs, made editorial alterations, changed his programme, studied samples of paper, chose leather bindings, and

arranged for the distribution of the edition. Though he was busy, as he said himself, he had time "to enjoy music and women." Above all, he was happy with little Eugénie. The "cynic" played with the child, took her for walks, and taught her how to read and write. After an hour of domestic peace, however, he reappeared in the great world, a gay creature of pleasure.

He was feeling particularly happy, though the Americans had not paid him. He was sure that they would eventually pay their debts—which amounted to three million six hundred thousand *livres*—for peace was imminent. To this independent people which was now a sovereign Power "gratitude was a personal virtue, and they would pay their debts."

When, on the third of September, 1783, peace was concluded in Versailles, Monsieur de Beaumarchais, the owner of the firm of Roderigue Hortalez and Company, who was then fifty-one, believed that his wealth would be secured for the rest of his life. The author of *The Marriage of Figaro*, too, hoped that his comedy would be produced, though two censors had already found his play unsuitable. Was this the result of antagonism towards him? Beaumarchais was sure that he could overcome it.

CHAPTER IV

WHEN Chamfort, the famous writer, was admitted to the French Academy, he had to deliver an inaugural address. As an Immortal he succeeded Saint-Palayes, the classical scholar, who had written a treatise about chivalry. In his inaugural address, Chamfort did not wish to fall below the standards set by his predecessor. Chamfort lectured on friendship. He discussed the twins of Selle, Castor, and Pollux; friendship in the highest sense of the word. His exalted speech was suitable to the atmosphere of the Academy, but when he returned to his home he longed to define friendship in the precise terms which were natural to him. "I have three kinds of friends," he said; "friends who love me, others who do not trouble about me, and others who are actually my enemies."

The Comte de Vaudreuil was one of the friends who loved him. The Count saw through his double-dealing, but he appreciated his dignity as an Academician as much as he did his qualities "as an intellectual ragamuffin." Vaudreuil and Chamfort appeared to be devoted to each other, Castor and Pollux. Vaudreuil tried to make his friend forget the class differences which separated them. He had assigned a wing of his palace to Chamfort, and hoped that people would not remember that Chamfort was a nobody while he himself was a noble lord. Perhaps his magnanimity was overdone, a passing mood of this very fashionable courtier, who was a favourite of Marie Antoinette and her circle. Chamfort, in any case, was not deceived by Vaudreuil's manner. Did this *grand seigneur* keep a member of the Academy, as he kept a pack of hounds, or a troupe of actors, so that he could see a comedy whenever he felt inclined?

Chamfort's attitude proved that the Count's efforts to bridge over class differences made Chamfort, who had been graciously elevated, antagonistic.

The aristocratic society into which he had been drawn by

Vaudreuil had sharpened his powers of observation. After every meeting with the friends of his friend he wrote an epigram attacking the aristocracy. Chamfort's witticisms were repeated in the cafés, in the Palais Royal, and finally reached the people. He was too courteous to make fun of the man whose hospitality he was enjoying. But he felt more at home with his other friend, the Marquis de Mirabeau, the outcast son of a tyrannical father, who had written *L'Ami des hommes*, and was called by this name. For Chamfort appreciated Mirabeau's genius; he confided his observations about human nature to him, and he preferred Mirabeau's companionship to the scented atmosphere in the courtier's mansion.

Chamfort had been one of the first to hear *The Barber of Seville*. In the decade since this reading, Beaumarchais had written the *Mémoires*, and the injustice he suffered brought him and Chamfort together. Chamfort had a profound insight into human nature, and he did not blame this remarkable quick-change artist for not having become a leader of the people. When Chamfort first met Beaumarchais, he had understood him, and though he was slightly contemptuous of him, he had realised that this energetic man was destined to combat the existing order. Beaumarchais had given Chamfort *The Marriage of Figaro* to read. Chamfort, the author of *Characters and Authors*, thought that this play combined all the anecdotes and characters of the age. The simple plot contained the outstanding problems of the period. The serious social struggle was described in gay scenes, and "Beaumarchais ridiculed the vital issues of the day": morals, laws, politics, even metaphysics. Chamfort also realised that Beaumarchais had revealed his own life in this comedy, his efforts to rise from the lowest class in society to the highest rank. The censorship objected to this play? This *souper libertain*, prepared by a cook who was a genius, was not to be set before the Parisians?

Chamfort was not a fighter. Had he been aggressive, he would have done the least helpful thing, for if, like Beaumarchais, he had

been a man of action, he would have tried to have the play produced. He would have protested to the Minister of Police against the censorship. He would have encouraged the appointment of a new censor, and if this man or the third or fourth censor after him had forbidden the play, he would have approached high office-holders. Then he would have met with the resistance Beaumarchais had encountered. Chamfort was surprised that this clever intriguer, this former courtier, had not discovered the one right way to achieve his end. Actually, however, when Beaumarchais gave Chamfort the manuscript, he had indeed found the one right way. For only the Comte de Vaudreuil, who had influence in the *Petit-Trianon*, could obtain permission to have *The Marriage of Figaro* produced. Chamfort felt himself to be merely a cog in the wheel of Beaumarchais' plans—and though he knew that Beaumarchais was exploiting him, he gave the manuscript to his friend Vaudreuil.

Beaumarchais had been right, but it soon became apparent that his idea was also wrong. The Count at once fell in love with the character of Almaviva. He was flattered to think that this fashionable Spanish Count had been modelled on him. The wit of the play, the cunning way in which one person was mistaken for another, the clever dialogue, the entire comedy appealed to him. To remain in his privileged position, Marie Antoinette's *maître de plaisir* had to invent new pleasures, new diversions, new sensations. He brought *The Marriage of Figaro* to the *Petit-Trianon*, and read it to the Queen. Princess Polignac and Princess Lamballe, who shared Marie Antoinette's favour as well as Vaudreuil's love, enthusiastically accepted his suggestion to give this play at the theatre in Versailles. Their interest was stimulated, because Louis XVI's censor had considered it too objectionable and dangerous for the King's subjects. They could at least play a trick on this dull man who refused to be amused by the merry jests of his wife's friends. As Louis would not laugh with the courtiers, they wanted to laugh

at him. Beaumarchais—Marie Antoinette remembered this name, she had almost quarrelled about him with her husband a long time ago when his *Mémoires* had amused her. She royally rewarded every pleasure that was given her. So the censor was creating difficulties for Beaumarchais? He disapproved of this charming comedy which her charming friend Vaudreuil had read aloud to her? The Queen was determined to get her own way. But when at her suggestion Louis XVI listened to *The Marriage of Figaro*—it had not been easy to persuade him to do so—he raised frequent objections. “That goes too far, that is improper,” he exclaimed. Marie Antoinette’s lady-in-waiting had been instructed to go on reading. The King rose quickly and declared: “That is horrible. This comedy must never be produced. The production of this play would be a dangerous inconsistency, unless the Bastille were destroyed beforehand.”

Marie Antoinette was intimidated. She asked in disappointment: “So the comedy will not be given?”

“No, certainly not. You can be sure of that.”

Beaumarchais’ clever move had made not only the censors and the Minister of Police, but the King himself antagonistic towards his play.

This development amused Beaumarchais; he was in a cheerful mood. For while his new friends in Versailles were concerned with *The Marriage of Figaro*, he had solved his financial problems. He had found associates for his American business, and thus new sources of income. The return shipments from America were still uncertain. This former English colony, which had become an independent State, was not paying her debts: Beaumarchais began to export goods to the French colonies which did pay. He also imported produce from these colonies to France. His business was enormous. The sums of seven figures in his accounts had been replaced by sums of eight figures. The vindication of his honour, his reinstatement in his offices, had increased his self-confidence.

He was not afraid of anyone. He did not care whether Vergennes approved of him or not. His business, undertaken with the Government's support, had not been remunerative. He had therefore emancipated himself from the State Exchequer, but he and the Comte de Maurepas remained friends. Beaumarchais heard in the Prime Minister's study that *The Marriage of Figaro* was not to be produced. "Not produced?" he asked. Through his information service he had heard about Marie Antoinette's efforts on his behalf. He left Maurepas and consulted the King's Keeper of the Great Seal. He was received without delay. He politely asked on what ground the "Crown of France"—as he ironically expressed it—had forbidden his play. "Your play will not be given, because the King does not wish it."

When the watchmaker's son replied, he spoke in the same tone in which the Comte de St. Florentin had once declared that he, the Minister of the Royal Household, declined to approve of Beaumarchais' appointment as Grand Master of the Rivers and Forests, despite the fact that the King had already signed this appointment. Beaumarchais said to the Keeper of the Seal: "If there is no other obstacle, my play will be produced."

The King's will, in other words, had clashed with the author's. Louis XVI trusted in his inherited power; Beaumarchais was counting on Louis XVI's weakness and on his own genius for finding a way out in every situation. He knew that Marie Antoinette's desire for amusement, her friends' craving for new sensations, would be of assistance to him. "This bored group of people were so idle that they were extremely particular about their pleasures. For this reason they did not want to miss Figaro's plebeian and obscene jests or his scornful remarks about the abuses of a society based on the privileges of the aristocracy, the enslavement of intellectual liberty, the despotism of those in power."

Beaumarchais applied the method which had succeeded so often.



MARIE ANTOINETTE

Engraving by John Boydell after a pastel by J. R. Smith

He roused the interest of a few in order to create a general interest. His carriage again stopped in front of aristocratic mansions ; again, in the drawing-rooms of dukes and counts, the members of France's most exclusive society congregated to hear him read his play. Years ago, when he wanted to make his *Eugénie* known, he had arranged to have the drama discussed by the aristocracy. Now he was no longer satisfied with this kind of propaganda. In an age when no systematic publicity existed, Beaumarchais knew how to win the support of the masses for *The Marriage of Figaro*. He was reported to have said: "The King does not want *The Marriage of Figaro* to be given : I, on the other hand, promise that it will be shown even if it is necessary to produce it in the choir of Nôtre-Dame Cathedral." To realise this blasphemous promise, the Court's efforts to persuade the King were not enough. The people, whose moods influenced Louis XVI's decisions, must demand that the censor's orders be revoked.

It was not easy to make verses popular in Paris until they had been sung on the stage. But Beaumarchais applied the talents of organisation, which had distinguished him when he purchased goods, when he found buyers for them, talents which he had in fact demonstrated in his many far-reaching business enterprises, to the circulation of the most striking songs in his play. Unemployed men and professional newsvendors had sold his *Mémoires* ; the army of men who were idlers, either by profession or because they could not find work, had grown. He exploited this increase in unemployment.

A few weeks after it became known in Paris that Louis XVI had forbidden the play, street urchins, unemployed men, and news-vendors were whistling the well-known melody of the song, "*Malbrough s'en va en guerre*." This cheerful and familiar tune impressed the entire city, and the Parisians could not help remembering the new text sung by Beaumarchais' singers. Everyone sang and whistled and kept step with the rhythm of this melody.

The Minister of Police, Monsieur de Lenoir, was annoyed. The melody seemed like a signal. Had the Freemasons, whom Monsieur de Lenoir always feared, inspired this tune? What power was at work behind the scenes? The text itself was quite innocuous, a sweet, sentimental song, with no revolutionary ardour, no dangerous allusions. One could turn and twist the words as one chose; there was no threat between the lines. The Minister of Police instructed the Secret Service to find out who had instigated this musical revolt. The entire city shared Monsieur de Lenoir's concern. The thousands of singers were questioned, and when asked what they had been singing, they said a ballad from *The Marriage of Figaro*, Beaumarchais' new play which had been forbidden by the censor.

The police reports, which Louis XVI read daily, included a note about this musical revolution. The King had been wondering why the ladies and gentlemen of his wife's *entourage* were whistling the Marlborough melody, and why they stopped when he appeared. Now he understood. He was a *pauvre homme*. Life was not easy for him. He was weak by nature. He sighed, and said to the Keeper of the Seal who brought him this report: "You will see, Beaumarchais will one day have more influence than the Keeper of the Seal." Louis did not mention his own power; he pretended that some subordinate had forbidden the play. Louis XVI would have yielded if the Keeper of the Seal, bowing deeply—was he, too, opposing his sovereign?—had not reminded the King that he himself had issued this order.

A letter from the Comte de Vaudreuil to his friend, the Duc de Fronsac, the old Duc de Richelieu's son, shows that Vaudreuil was furious because he had not yet obtained the King's consent. "There can be no salvation without *The Marriage of Figaro*" was the slogan adopted by the courtiers in their conspiracy in favour of this play, which so frankly exposed them. They were active chiefly because the King had opposed their wishes. Were they to accept

his orders, to allow anyone to interfere with their pleasure? They were particularly irritated by the King's unreasonable caprice, because just at this time Catherine the Great's son and heir, Grand Duke Paul of Russia, and his wife had arrived in Paris, and naturally these visitors wanted to see Beaumarchais' comedy, which was the latest sensation in France.

Baron Grimm, the jealous critic, who had declared after the first performance of *Eugénie* that Beaumarchais would never achieve anything, even mediocrity, was forced to write an obsequious letter to the author whom he had once treated contemptuously. Grimm respectfully asked Beaumarchais not to compromise him by telling others that he, Grimm, had approached Beaumarchais on behalf of the Grand Duke. Grimm enquired whether Beaumarchais would oblige Prince Jussapow, the Grand Duke's Chamberlain, and read *The Marriage of Figaro* to the future Tsar.

A friend of the Grand Duchess, Baroness Oberkirch, who was present when Beaumarchais read his play, described the author in her *Mémoires*: "I was charmed," she wrote, "by Monsieur de Beaumarchais' frank, spirited, and somewhat impudent expression. I was reproved for finding him attractive, for it is said that he is a scoundrel. I don't deny that he may be. But he is extremely intelligent, he is courageous whenever occasion arises, and he is temperamental. What magnificent characteristics these are."

This aristocratic lady's naïve admiration was transferred to her friend, the Grand Duchess. She wanted to be attentive to her mother-in-law, Catherine II. Surely Voltaire's distinguished friend would like to produce a comedy which had not yet been seen in Versailles at her theatre in Saint Petersburg. Beaumarchais declined to send the manuscript to Russia before the play had been performed in France. A play was not really finished, he said, until after the first performance, and until then the author could not possibly venture to present it to the Empress of all the Russians. In view of Catherine's interest in the play, Prince Jussapow urged Beaumarchais to

try to have it produced. Jussapow asked Beaumarchais to mention the Empress's interest in *The Marriage of Figaro* to the authorities in France.

Obviously, *The Marriage of Figaro* was not only a danger to France's domestic peace, it was also affecting her international relations. Beaumarchais wrote gaily to inform the Minister of Police that the Chamberlain of the Grand Duke of Russia had just left him. He casually mentioned in this letter that he had read the play to these distinguished foreigners and to the Duchesse de Richelieu (the mother of Fronsac, Vaudreuil's friend) and her guests. At the Duchesse de Richelieu's palace *The Marriage of Figaro* had amused bishops and archbishops, who had honoured the author by saying that they were prepared to declare publicly that the play did not contain a single word which offended against morality.

It is not known whether the Minister of Police received a hint from above, or whether he preferred to remain aloof from a conflict involving so many prominent individuals. At any rate, he pretended not to know that the Duchesse de Polignac was arranging a private performance of *The Marriage of Figaro* in honour of the Comte d'Artois, the King's youngest brother. No one interfered with the rehearsals of the actors of the *Comédie française*. The date of the performance was fixed, and the Duchesse de Polignac had invited the King's brothers and the leading aristocrats of France and their ladies. It was to be a magnificent *théâtre paré* performance. The streets round the theatre were crowded with curious people. Hundreds of carriages had arrived; everywhere Beaumarchais' gay army was whistling and singing the Marlborough song with his text. Beaumarchais' victory seemed assured, but before the curtain rose the Police Minister's carriage stopped in front of the theatre. Monsieur de Lenoir, in his robes of office, and accompanied by two officers, informed the hostess, the guests, and the actors that the performance had been forbidden in the name of the King.

Beaumarchais could not immediately occupy himself with *Figaro's* fate. He went to London on business. Important financial transactions had to be settled; he stopped in Nantes to supervise the distribution of his shipments from abroad. Maurepas had instructed him to investigate conditions in London and to report to him. He had far more work than he could do in the few weeks he was to be away. And as he had not promised anyone that *The Marriage of Figaro* would be given by a certain date, he thought it unwise to precipitate his conflict with Louis XVI, who was showing such unusual firmness of character.

In London, he was surprised by a letter from Vaudreuil. The Count asked for his permission to produce *The Marriage of Figaro* in his Castle Gennevilliers in honour of the Comte d'Artois. Beaumarchais cheerfully replied that as the King had forbidden this play, it must be considered immoral until the censor had changed his mind. Beaumarchais could not agree to the performance in honour of His Majesty's brother until the King had permitted the actors of the *Comédie française* to produce this play in their theatre after the private performance. In amiably ironical words Beaumarchais added that he had hoped, with *The Marriage of Figaro*, to give Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette a pleasure in honour of the Dauphin's birth.

Beaumarchais returned from London in time to hasten to Gennevilliers. The audience had arrived, but there was not room in the little theatre for the curious crowd who wanted to see the play. Gentlemen in their dress clothes, ladies in festive crinolines, stood close together, and the stuffy theatre made the author gasp. He spoke to his hostess, and then he smashed a window with the gold hilt of his sword. "Fresh air," he exclaimed. And the aristocratic audience, unaware of the future symbolic significance of these words, applauded them as enthusiastically as they applauded Figaro's devastating remarks.

A few months later *The Marriage of Figaro* had been passed by

several censors, and the Minister of Police, who had submitted a number of petitions to the King, was finally told that the author "could easily omit the unsuitable passages," as the comedy was too long.

Beaumarchais left out only insignificant passages. He believed that he could do as he liked. He had won for himself the support of more and more patrons; a reading and a conversation at Baron de Breteuil's had caused even cynical Chamfort to remark enthusiastically: "I have never met such a wizard. Beaumarchais' efforts to justify his work, his mind, his originality, and his art, were more remarkable than the wit and brains reflected in the comedy itself. He seemed like a man drunk with champagne, who crushed precious stones between his teeth, and covered his audience with the dust of diamonds."

Chamfort had well described Beaumarchais' mood. He felt intoxicated. Every word he uttered was as effective as a rocket. When he was told that the King, who was helpless and ponderous, warned him not to produce his play as it would fail, Beaumarchais boldly declared: "Yes, it will fail, but fifty evenings in succession."

The public first night of *The Marriage of Figaro* was announced for the twenty-seventh of April, 1784. Thousands of people stood for hours in front of the booking office. The crowd was as mixed as though the Revolution had already abolished class differences. One saw "dignified Knights of the Cross of Louis, officers and middle-class women, porters and countesses." Men and women who had no tickets, but who knew an actor or an actress, spent the night in the dressing-rooms hoping to be given an unreserved seat. The doors had been forced open, the gates had been broken down. Before the performance the theatre looked like the scene of a riot and not like the eve of a harmless first night.

The stalls were crowded. The excited audience shouted whenever a well-known figure appeared in a box. An actor, gazing at the spectators through the peep-hole in the curtain, humorously

remarked that only the King himself was not attending this meeting of the Privy Council assembled in the theatre. All the royal princes, all the brothers of the King were present.

Monsieur de Beaumarchais entered a box shortly before the curtain rose. He was accompanied by two *abbés*, and he sat down between them. They were to give him their moral support if the King's prophecy was fulfilled and *The Marriage of Figaro* was a failure.

The success was overwhelming. *The Marriage of Figaro* was performed seventy times in succession. Beaumarchais himself said: "There is only one thing that is madder than my play, and that is this success." He had defeated the King. Louis XVI's successor on the French throne, Napoleon I, later declared that the success of *The Marriage of Figaro* was more than a theatrical event. It also showed that "the Revolution was approaching."

CHAPTER V

AT the height of his success, when Monsieur de Beaumarchais was wealthy, famous, and respected, he wanted to help alleviate the increasing distress of the population. He dedicated the proceeds of the fiftieth performance of *The Marriage of Figaro* to philanthropy. A home was to be founded where "poor mothers could feed their infants." He was astonished when his post the morning after this gala performance contained malicious letters. Was it true that Paris was laughing at him and his good intentions? He was said to be giving milk to the infants because he felt remorse at having poisoned the mothers. A group of pious people were decrying *The Marriage of Figaro* as immoral. They were calling the comedy a "text-book of immorality."

Beaumarchais did not understand the inconsistencies of the new epoch which, partly stimulated by *The Marriage of Figaro*, had so suddenly begun. He was reproached for his charitable gesture, he was ridiculed because he was posing as a philanthropic *grand seigneur*, but at the same time he was reviled because he had attacked the aristocracy and had shown up the shortcomings of the governing class. He did not realise that the age which had made him great was over. He himself had undermined his dual position as a mediator between the people and the King. If he had chosen one faction or the other he could still have developed beyond himself. But the strain of the last few years was beginning to tell on him. He was hurt by the antagonism of others. He was aware that he was growing old. He was fifty-two or three and his energies were slackening, though he never spared himself, "as his inner restlessness gave him no peace." He was wealthy and he longed to devote himself to his many business interests, and to the pleasant diversion of writing plays during his leisure hours in the evening. But this was impossible.

Beaumarchais had sown too much unrest, now he could not avoid reaping it.

After a number of interludes he again enjoyed domestic life; he was happy with Theresa, who was now his wife. Shortly before the laws of the *ancien régime* were abolished, Beaumarchais had legally married her, so that his daughter could inherit his name as well as his fortune. He had taken Eugénie away from the convent, where she had first been educated, as he wished to bring her up according to his own ideas. The little girl was dressed like the aristocratic children of the greatest families in France. Accompanied by her governess, she went for drives in her carriage. Of course, unlike the young girls early in the century, she was taught more than "good deportment." Beaumarchais and his sister Julie supervised her studies. She had private tutors, who instructed the young ladies of the upper classes in the works of Rousseau and Voltaire. Beaumarchais was deeply attached to his charming daughter. She compensated him for the painful loss of the children of his second marriage. He had no son, but he had a daughter. Once more he was living a family idyll, and he believed that the last years of his life would be peaceful.

He had not altogether ceased to struggle, he had not yet given up his career, but it did not really matter whether he was promoted from the unofficial to the official adviser of the Minister of Finance. He drove to Versailles, he performed his duties as the Lieutenant-General of the Royal Hunts, he was busy in the offices of Roderigue Hortalez and Company, he supervised the publication of Voltaire's works, and he wrote. The new play he was writing, a comedy, *Tarare*, with an old-fashioned background, dealt "with the Figaro-motive in a tragic form." He was conscious that it had become more difficult for him to write dialogue in ordinary language. He wrote verses in which philosophical and wise thoughts "contrasted personalities and character with the social position of the individuals described."

This development was sincere. After his great success Beaumarchais had become tired of the many masks he had assumed. He felt that his inner flame was dying down. He asked himself what had caused this change. Was he satiated? Did he feel the need, after his multifarious roads to success, to remain upon the dignified heights? He was afraid of attacks, because he feared that he would not be able to defend himself.

Depressed by this vague fear, Beaumarchais read a hateful article against himself in the *Journal de Paris*. The author was an anonymous *abbé*. The clerical gentleman, "whose profession prevented him from attending the theatre," criticised the "Figaro epidemic" which was infecting Paris. Beaumarchais answered sharply. Why this belated attack months after his great success? And this success had not been easy to achieve. "Be quiet, *abbé*, be gone!" Beaumarchais was nervous, and he overdid it. He answered this anonymous attack: "Do you think that I, who had to conquer lions and tigers in order to have my play produced, am like a Dutch maid who, every morning, must kill the noxious vermin of the night with a feather-broom?"

Vermin? He was verminous? In his magnificent palace the anonymous *abbé* read Beaumarchais' furious reply. The King's brother, the Comte de Provence, who was later Louis XVIII, had attacked Beaumarchais merely to practise his style. He had nothing to do. He was bored. As *The Marriage of Figaro* was in vogue, and it was the great fashion to oppose the popular successes of the day, he had adversely criticised the play which he had originally applauded with enthusiasm. Vermin—he? A descendant of Saint-Louis? His Royal Highness, the Comte de Provence, angrily re-read Beaumarchais' answer. So this man had conquered "lions and tigers" before *The Marriage of Figaro* was produced? Obviously the King and the Keeper of the Seal were meant by these lions and tigers. The Comte de Provence craved revenge, because, though he had written anonymously, he had been relegated to a position in

the insect world. He therefore informed his royal brother that Beaumarchais had called him "an animal," though a lion.

Louis learned about this insult after losing a game of cards. Holding the ace of spades in his hand, he watched his brother pocket the *louis d'ors* he had won. Louis was extremely economical and regretted his losses. At least, however, he had won his brother as an ally against Beaumarchais. The King demanded a quill, and wrote on the blank surface of the ace of spades, which had become useless as he had lost the game, that Beaumarchais was to be taken at once to the St. Lazare prison.

It was Chénu, the Police Commissioner's, painful duty to arrest Beaumarchais. He found him at home. The servant told Chénu that his master could not see him, for he was entertaining the Prince of Nassau-Siegen and the Abbé de Colonne. As such distinguished guests—the brother of the Finance Minister and a German Prince—were with him, the Police Commissioner would have to wait. Monsieur Chénu showed his order from the King. The words "at once" were underlined. To St. Lazare? The servant began to weep. His master to St. Lazare? This man of fifty-three was to be sent to the prison for young delinquents?

When Monsieur Chénu entered the brightly lighted dining-room and arrested Beaumarchais in the name of the King, he was surprised to find Beaumarchais so calm. He took leave of his guests, urged them to finish their meal, and got into the Police Commissioner's carriage. During the drive he talked pleasantly to Monsieur Chénu, but when the carriage reached St. Lazare, and Beaumarchais recognised the prison, the Police Commissioner had to support him. He was being taken to a house of correction as though he were a criminal street urchin!

When the cell door was closed, Beaumarchais had only one thought: revenge. He was sure that he himself need do nothing. The thousands who had acclaimed him as the "Apostle of Freedom" after the publication of his *Mémoires*, and more recently after

the performance of *The Marriage of Figaro*, would band together and revolt when they heard about the King's despotic act. Arrested without cause and taken to a dishonourable prison ? The powerful merchant, the famous writer, the influential courtier, thrown into the prison for young delinquents ?

Louis XVI's conscience troubled him when Beaumarchais' friends pointed out the possible consequences of his command. Once before the King had been forced to give way to this horrible creature; the monarch decided not to be stubborn, for he knew that in the end he would have to yield. He therefore signed a *lettre de cachet* ordering Beaumarchais' release.

The King believed that this would settle the matter, but when, the next morning, Monsieur Chénу opened the door of Beaumarchais' cell and told him that he was free, Beaumarchais declared that he would remain in St. Lazare until he knew why he had been arrested. The Commissioner of Police could not persuade him to leave.

Groups of men congregated at the street corners shouting "tyranny" whenever a Government official passed. The printing works were busy during the night. Broadsheets, distributed in the streets, announced the bare fact that Beaumarchais had been arrested and taken to St. Lazare. Everyone asked why this had happened ? Why had the author been persecuted in such a despotic and terrible manner ?

A few hours later other street vendors, recognised by some as the servants and the grooms of the Comte de Provence, were offering a crude caricature of Beaumarchais for sale. In this drawing the famous man was naked; he was bending forward, and a youth in the prison garb of St. Lazare was whipping him.

A few hours afterwards these same men sold gibes in verse against Beaumarchais. The printers' ink was still damp on these leaflets. Though these songs never became popular, everyone remembered them.

Beaumarchais' voluntary imprisonment lasted for six days. Emissaries of the King came frequently to urge him to leave the prison, as the agitation of the people, who were impatient to see him again, was stimulated by his absence. He was not prepared to drive home until the Minister of Police came in person and promised that reparation would be made to him. Then he locked himself up in his study and refused to see anyone. Despite his seclusion more visitors appeared at the Hôtel de Hollande than ever came there either before or afterwards. Innumerable carriages stopped in front of Beaumarchais' mansion, many prominent men wrote their names at the door-porter's lodge. The entire aristocracy of France wanted to pay him their respects; they were as sympathetic as though he had suffered a bereavement.

In his self-imposed seclusion Beaumarchais wrote to the King. Louis XVI was in an awkward situation. Beaumarchais' memorandum proved beyond a doubt that the King had been carried away by his despotism. This man was undoubtedly right when he said it was ridiculous to assume that he had tried to insult the King in a censored newspaper. The King had expelled him from the community of citizens. Beaumarchais declared that he would resign from his offices "until the cloud has vanished which has been cast over my person and my credit before the Nation, before Europe, and before America."

The exchequer was exhausted, but the King could think of only one way to reconcile the offended man. Louis XVI took out an old petition in which Roderigue Hortalez and Company had asked to be compensated for the firm's losses. Without verifying Beaumarchais' accounts, the King, usually so economical, signed a voucher for two million one hundred and fifty thousand *livres*. When the King met these demands of Beaumarchais' firm it meant that they were officially recognised as correct. To grant Beaumarchais a special token of his favour furthermore, Louis awarded him an annual pension of one thousand two hundred *livres* from his private

revenue. After this the Court and the people completely lost faith in Louis' "absolute power." Again Beaumarchais had unconsciously contributed towards the collapse of the monarchy.

Two millions to compensate him for this insult to his honour ? The wealthy business man might have been satisfied with this reparation. On the day, however, when he heard about his pension from the King, he was walking through the city for the first time since his imprisonment. He saw the caricature of himself which was being offered for sale by the Comte de Provence's servants—"Monsieur de Beaumarchais being whipped." The leaflet fell from his hand; he was so weak that he leaned against the wall of the nearest house. He could not bear this disgrace.

Did Beaumarchais, now that he was ageing, feel that honour was, after all, more important than wealth ? He was afraid of people, thinking they might believe that he had actually been whipped. In the night he often awoke in fear; he had dreamed that he was tied to a pillory—and that the ladies and gentlemen in the stalls applauded enthusiastically while the blows rained down upon him.

He had lost faith in himself, he suffered from melancholia. He was powerless, as he could not stop the distribution of this insulting caricature. By rousing public ridicule against him the King's brother had defeated him with his own weapon. As he was incapable of organising a counter-attack, he fled into solitude.

He refused to go to Versailles until Marie Antoinette asked him herself. Paisiello had set his *Barber of Seville* to music; the author was urged to attend the first performance which was to be given in the Trianon. As amateur actors were appearing in it he was requested to show forbearance. The Comte de Vaudreuil would take the part of Almaviva; the Comte d'Artois, the King's second brother, was to be Figaro. And Rosina ? Marie Antoinette herself was to play this part.

Two days before this performance an awkward incident occurred in Versailles. One scandal followed another. Paris was seething

with excitement. A cardinal had been arrested. The Grand Almoner of France had been sent to prison. What could people think of a king who ordered the arrest of a famous writer and then imprisoned one of the highest dignitaries of the State? The people learned that Cardinal de Rohan had given the Comtesse Lamotte a diamond necklace for the Queen. Marie Antoinette said that she had never received this gift from the generous giver. Rubbish, people said in Paris; she is a hypocrite, she is pretending to be innocent. She is no better than the girls of the streets, except that she is paid a higher price. The poor girls in the streets are given a few *livres*, while she receives a diamond necklace worth millions.

Marie Antoinette was not aware of the rumours which were spreading in Paris. Comtesse Lamotte, a woman of doubtful character, had shamefully exploited the Queen's bad reputation. The Countess had enticed the Cardinal to give her the valuable necklace by pretending that the Queen wanted it. The Queen was innocent, and she believed that all of France was convinced of her innocence. She had met Paris and the people only at official receptions and during the drives, which, incognito, she occasionally took at night with d'Artois, her brother-in-law, and her women friends. She did not know the Parisians, and she was unconscious of her increasing unpopularity. She was in a particularly care-free mood. Louis XVI, the outraged husband, had sent Rohan, whom she hated, to the Bastille. She was reckless. She did not know what a bad impression the diamond necklace affair would make on the people. She thought that it would make her popular to give *The Barber of Seville*, for the author had been unjustly imprisoned.

He would "have been consistent" had he refused the invitation and openly sided with the enemies of the Court. The people would have acclaimed him as a victim. His rehabilitation at the Court, on the other hand, caused the people to disown him. It did not matter, he thought, if the broadsheets against him revealed his past. He believed that he could destroy his opponents with his

pen as he had always done. But he realised with fear that his pen had become too light. He was not equal to the forceful polemics from the younger generation accusing him of corruption. "Beaumarchais sweats crime from every pore," Bergasse, the lawyer, wrote. Bergasse was defending an injured husband, Monsieur Kornmann, whose wife had appealed to Beaumarchais for help. It was a complicated affair. The husband, who apparently hoped to take possession of his wife's dowry, unjustly persecuted her and cast suspicion on her. Beaumarchais supported the woman's claims; in hundreds of previous cases he had made his powerful influence felt. He was called the "dregs of the Nation," because he intervened to the Lieutenant of Police for a helpless woman? To prove Beaumarchais' unscrupulous methods, Bergasse asked the late Madame Franquet's relatives for the letters young Caron had written as the "Abbé d'Arpajon." Bergasse copied these letters in his brief, but he declared that he had the originals. With unfair cleverness he had collected the unfavourable comments which had been published about Beaumarchais in old *Mémoires*. When Beaumarchais read Bergasse's memoranda, he was desperate because he was unable to reply with equal unscrupulousness. He had risen too high in the world, and as a result he had become discriminating in his methods. Every insult hurt him like a physical blow. Again and again he was near despair when he remembered the caricature. His own past paralysed him. Should he begin again, resume the fight? But why? People were waiting for his answer, for a devastating *Mémoire*, and they were disappointed when this millionaire, this author favoured by the hated Queen, this "aristocrat," drove to the *Palais de Justice* to bring an action for libel.

While he was depending upon legal weapons, the young pamphleteers of the young age continued to fight him with the weapons he himself had once used. His actions were ridiculed, his writing was devastated by his critics. He did not feel capable of answering in the same tone. People jeered at him when he declared: "My life has

been embittered. . . . I have a wife who is dearer to me than anything else, I should wish to die at once, if she were not happy." What concern of an agitated world were the tearful adjurations of a grumbling and wealthy man? People supported Bergasse and praised Kornmann; Beaumarchais was publicly denounced when Parliament sentenced his two enemies.

A short while before he had been beloved by the nation which had praised him. Now the people denounced him. He did not know why. He did not understand that he was being reproached because he, who had risen from the people, had acquired wealth while they were suffering the most abject poverty. The masses in the *faubourgs* were embittered when they learned that he had bought a plot of ground on which he planned to build a palace. No one took into consideration that he longed to show his power and his wealth because public opinion had turned against him. He avoided the society of others and concentrated on his business and literary interests. He had invited Salieri, the composer, to stay with him and to set his play *Tarare* to music. He lived for his pleasure in this music and remained in seclusion. At the first performance of *Tarare* he did not take any curtain calls. He shrank from being seen even when the audience shouted for him.

Beaumarchais lost his reputation quickly. Soon he was no longer famous. He was notorious as a man and as a writer. He continued to be respected as a business man, as an adviser to ministers. When his carriage drove through the streets, the passers-by knew that he was going to Versailles to advise Monsieur de Calonne, the Minister of Finance, who had accepted the slogan of Beaumarchais' youth: "If a man wants to borrow money, he must appear to be rich." Calonne did not object when the Queen and her circle wasted vast sums. The great luxury at the French Court would make it seem that the French Exchequer was inexhaustible. If money was spent lavishly it would be assumed that France could afford it. In three years the French treasury borrowed four hundred and eighty-

seven million *livres*. When this period had elapsed there were only four hundred thousand *livres* in the Treasury. The war against England in favour of the United States had created deficits which could not be met. The State faced bankruptcy. Monsieur de Calonne believed that the abolition of the aristocracy's and the clergy's privileges was the only means to avoid this disaster. The large landowners should pay taxes; taxation should not be confined to the small landowners and peasants. No one had expected such a suggestion from this well-dressed man, this super-courtier, who had never refused a wish expressed by the Queen or her friends. Abolish the privileges of the aristocracy? Calonne was forced to resign. Monsieur de Brienne's short term of office followed, but he accomplished as little as his predecessors had done. He was succeeded by Necker, a bourgeois, who had held this office before.

While the distress of the State and of the population increased, and France was approaching a catastrophe, the great leaseholders were profiteering. They demanded huge interest rates on advance payments they made the State on taxes, and they speculated with these profits. Industrialisation, which had originated in England, had begun in France as well. Beaumarchais exploited this development. His business friends, the Perriers, who were speculators, had obtained a concession to filter the Seine water and to sell it to the population of Paris. The *Compagnie des Eaux* had imported the first steam pump into France. This concern had built a huge reservoir where the filtered drinking water was to be kept. But the new company was short of money before its plans could be completed. The brothers Perrier's partner, Monsieur de Beaumarchais, advised them to reorganise into a joint-stock company. The nominal value of each share was twelve hundred *livres*. In a propaganda pamphlet, Monsieur de Beaumarchais promised the stockholders that most probably these shares would rise to fourteen thousand *livres*. He

argued as follows. More water would be consumed when the quality of the water had improved. A century before a mirror factory had been founded and people laughed at the stockholders who spent three thousand *livres* for a share. Their heirs had received five hundred thousand *livres* for each share.

Beaumarchais had written this pamphlet not only to attract shareholders. The Marquis de Mirabeau (it will be remembered that he was a friend of Chamfort) had written a pamphlet against stock-exchange operations, and he mentioned the *Compagnie des Eaux*. Mirabeau? Beaumarchais referred to this attack in his pamphlet. He called it a *mirabelle*, a plum, with which the author was trying to induce the public to depress the market.

Beaumarchais' pamphlet demonstrated his versatile experience. It was brilliantly written, and it would have made a great impression on capitalist readers, for they would have stimulated the market by purchasing shares in the *Compagnie des Eaux*. But Mirabeau was the first to see it. He was not yet famous, but the *Ami des hommes* had been popular since his violent attacks on Calonne's financial manœuvres. Because of his huge build he was affectionately called *Mirabeau-tonneau*, *Mirabeau-barrel*, in the gardens of the Palais Royal. Mirabeau was popular. The great leader of the Revolution stood like a monument in the growing movement of the people. When he replied to Monsieur de Beaumarchais, this "miserable charlatan," popular support was on his side. "We wish to inform you that impudence and Court intrigues are not strong enough to destroy a man whose strength comes from within himself." Mirabeau had known how to impress this bourgeois who was outraged by Court life. He need not have gone into Beaumarchais' past, which was well known. The people agreed with Mirabeau when he wrote: "I want to give you some advice, Monsieur de Beaumarchais; try to be forgotten."

The polemic was over. Beaumarchais was silent. Beaumarchais did not answer. Only the good he had done was forgotten—

“the bad still lived.” This man, who was depressed because he was growing old, whose hearing was impaired, would have been more fortunate if he could have been forgotten altogether. But this would have been inconsistent with his nature and with his entire career. Whether he liked it or not, he was in the lime-light. He had begun to build his new home, he had spent almost a million *livres* on it, and he had to go on, though his friends urged him to give up the idea of this palace. For hunger riots, which were brutally suppressed, were occurring more frequently, and it was unwise to rouse the envy of the masses. The garden was laid out, the dome of a luxurious pavilion loomed above the wall, and could be seen by the slum-dwellers who lived in the district. Soon Beaumarchais’ magnificent mansion was called the aristocratic counterpart to the Bastille.

His palace was completed and furnished in the year 1788. Beaumarchais moved into it, and devoted himself to the enjoyment of his property. “My charming daughter was a delight, I was happy with old friends, there was nothing else I wanted in the world.”

There is a letter written by Beaumarchais on the thirteenth of May, 1789, to Monsieur de Crosne, the new Minister of Police. The last six months had been crowded with stirring events. The Third Estate, the bourgeoisie, called by this name in literature for the first time in Beaumarchais’ play *The Two Friends*, had been summoned to an assembly of the Estates-General. Sicèys wrote at this time: “What is the Third Estate? Everything. What was it heretofore? Nothing. What does it want? To be something.”

People were clamouring for reforms, insisting on a Constitution and protesting, when the King declared: “My wishes are the law.” True, no one was thinking in terms of a Republic. Changes and a decent livelihood were all that the population was demanding. They implored Louis XVI to alleviate the poverty: “Sire, your

subjects have given you undeniable proof of their patience. The people are martyrs, who live only to suffer."

Neither the representatives of the Third Estate, demanding reforms, nor the courtiers, defending their privileges, nor the King himself, no one in fact was aware that while the bourgeoisie was preparing for the great attack on the aristocracy, the people themselves were beginning to organise. The Court at Versailles had no idea what developments were imminent, even the Minister of Police, to whom Beaumarchais wrote, did not know. The defence against a revolt by the people had been prepared only on paper. New regulations, which did not really decrease the existing distress, had been issued by the ministers—but what good did they do? Cavalry regiments galloped from Versailles to Paris, and from Paris to Versailles, to maintain law and order. Riots were expected daily, but the authorities did not believe that anything more serious than riots would occur. The Court considered the situation disquieting but not dangerous. The Court was indulgent. It was impossible to arrest the many individuals who called the Queen "Madame Deficit." "If one had done so thousands would have been sent to prison," Mercy, the Austrian Ambassador, wrote to Marie Antoinette's brother, the Emperor, in Vienna.

The Minister of Police knew this. But did he not understand Beaumarchais' letter? "All the men in the building trade are meeting at an appointed time," Beaumarchais wrote; "something is going to happen; men will be killed."

In his frightening dreams the old man saw the ghastly carnage that was to come. The people had cast him out, but he still understood them. He had married the people, not only by writing his *Marriage of Figaro*; beyond that he had been one of the first men to contribute towards the great Revolution. Now he was afraid of it.

PART V

THE GREAT FEAR

CHAPTER I

IN the middle of the nineteenth century, Louis de Loménie, the distinguished historian, found an unpublished manuscript by Pierre Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais among the documents, papers, and letters he discovered in a Paris attic. This manuscript was not dated, but the contents and the handwriting prove quite conclusively that Beaumarchais wrote it when, as an old man, he was balancing the accounts of his life. "What was I really?" are the words written on the paper, which has turned yellow.

At first glance this document seems to indicate that even in his old age this cynic remained cheerful and enjoyed making ironical remarks about his career. But a closer reading reveals that this humour was a pose. The entertaining style is at first deceptive; soon the reader is frightened by the ghostly seriousness of the manuscript. It is obvious that Beaumarchais had no intention of jesting; his contemplations are merely in the same light style in which he wrote his famous *Mémoires* and his comedies.

The colleagues in each of his various professions did not acknowledge him as one of themselves; they said that he belonged to another profession. Was that tragic or comic? Or both? The reader must judge this for himself; watchmaker and inventor, author and speculator, shipowner and publisher, adviser and antagonist to the monarchy, contractor to the terrorists and their prisoner, accused and judge, unfaithful lover and monogamous husband—that was his superficial portrait. Beaumarchais commented on this mosaic of contradictions with the phrase: "I was only myself." He himself, a multifarious nature, was concealed behind this mask of versatility.

In his palace, at a desk which, so envious people in the slums declared, cost thirty thousand *livres*, he tried to solve the mystery of his own nature. Simultaneously, though he was too deaf to hear it,

the Bastille was being stormed. It was the time to make a confession. If the uprising of hundreds of thousands caused the monarchy to surrender, he must again change the pattern of his life. Would he be able to do this?

What had happened? He did not understand at first. Though Beaumarchais was one of the first to predict and to fear the Revolution, he was almost as innocent as Louis XVI who, when he was informed that the people had rebelled, asked: "Has there been a revolt?"—"No, Sire, it is the Revolution," was the answer.

Beaumarchais trembled. He sided neither with the revolutionaries nor with those who were being attacked.

One frightening day passed; a new day broke. On the square, in front of Beaumarchais' palace, lay the dead bodies of the men who had victoriously stormed the Bastille. The heroes of the day had marched past his window carrying the head of Monsieur de Launay, the Commandant of the Bastille, on a pike. One of the Queen's former hairdressers had arranged the hair on this dead head in a fashionable mode. Beaumarchais could hardly believe what he saw and heard. The crowd had come from the Palais Royal? He was told that a young man had jumped on to a table calling the people to arms. The violence, which he himself had prophesied, had broken out. The defensive action of the people, who had been robbed, was developing into an aggressive movement? An increasing number of individuals was calling the population to arms; the whole city was prepared for battle. An army of highwaymen roamed through the streets. Had Beaumarchais not warned the Minister of Police? If only his wife and child were safe. The whole country was plunged into fear: "The highwaymen are approaching. They are looting the homes, burning down houses, strangling women and children. There they come; can't you see their pikes behind the foliage?"

Innumerable rumours were repeated in the square in front of the Bastille. Smoke rose from the scene of the fire; at night ghostly

figures looked for treasures under the ruins. Beaumarchais was frightened. The other bourgeois, who with him had longed to teach the haughty aristocracy that all men were equal, that birth alone did not determine a man's destiny, all these bourgeois, who were the articulate and also the underground champions of the Revolution, now feared for their middle-class security. They organised committees, they were afraid of the furious mob of unemployed men, whose number was tremendously increased by an influx of men from the provinces. These men shouted for bread, they attacked the property, the persons, and the lives of the bourgeoisie just as they were assaulting the aristocracy. Every well-dressed man was considered an aristocrat. Everyone who owned a house was a gentleman. The Third Estate, which had been so proud of its middle-class existence, was now supported by a fourth estate, whom the bourgeoisie had not taken into consideration. The privileges of birth were being shattered. The dreams of Beaumarchais' youth were fulfilled in his old age. But this development made him unhappy. His selfishness was revenged; he had always thought of himself and never of others. Now, when equality, fraternity, and liberty were being proclaimed, he realised with a painful shock that he had considered equality and liberty, but not fraternity. He had lived for himself—and he was alone. This realisation caused him to assume a mask for the last time in his life. He decided to offer his services to the people as he had offered them to the King. He hoped to achieve in the lowest class of society as much as he had accomplished in the highest. It was said that he was hoarding grain in the cellars of his palace, hoping to sell it at usurious prices. The old gentleman, who had once been foppish, was simply dressed, a plain citizen like his father, when he attended a meeting of the city councillors and asked to have his house searched.

Helpful friends urged him to leave Paris. He stayed, and persisted until he was given a "certificate of good behaviour." He suc-

ceeded in being elected as a member of the district council, but envious people attacked him when he held this office. He was too wealthy, he lived too luxuriously. He was constantly menaced. The announcement of his death was delivered at his home. He could see himself in this picture, dangling from a street standard. He was threatened that he would share the fate of the hated aristocracy to which he had wanted to belong.

He could have emigrated with the Prince. But how could this old man go to a foreign country, leaving his wife and child to an uncertain fate? He did not wish to leave Paris. He was tired, and he considered joining the advocates of the Revolution, who were now acclaimed by the entire people. Should he select phrases from his armoury of pamphlets which would appeal to the tribunal of the people? Should he hurl these phrases into the public meetings and help the others to stir up the flames which it was too late to extinguish?

The fourth of August followed the storming of the Bastille on the fourteenth of July. On the fourth of August class privileges were abolished. The King had not given his consent? He raised objections? Two months later the *dames des halles* brought Monsieur Veto and his wife, the "baker-woman," from Versailles to Paris. The King's veto might have prevented the laws, decided upon by the National Assembly, from being passed, and Marie Antoinette was accused of having consumed all the bread herself. The National Guard, commanded by Lafayette, had to protect the royal couple against the "passionate love" of the Parisians, when the King was finally in their midst. Would Monsieur Veto still contradict? Would he refuse to give his royal consent to the will of the people?

A hard winter began. It was dangerous to be wealthy, and anyone whom Mirabeau, the great man of the moment, pushed aside with a deprecatory gesture had little chance of being heard. The Ministers and the National Assembly had ceased to control the situation. Clubs, centres of revolt, had been founded and were

supported by the organised masses ; they were factious, applauding wildly when one of their favourites mounted the speakers' platform. So many influential actors had joined the theatre of personalities that there was no room for Beaumarchais, who was an old rebel but a new revolutionary.

He had not heard the magnificent remark of a Deputy, who, when asked after the Revolution why he had never spoken at a public meeting, why he had not been prominent, and where he had been all this time, merely said : " I lived." Cautiously this man had seen the heads of most of his friends rolling into the basket below the guillotine. Beaumarchais, on the other hand, could not be silent. He was afraid that, though he was forgotten, though his life or his death was unimportant to this new age, one of his many enemies might find him an easy victim for revenge. Who would care if the former writer, the former *grand seigneur*, the *ci-devant* Beaumarchais, had been murdered ? He continued to call himself Beaumarchais and not citizen Caron, though when the titles of the nobility were abolished, it was expressly stipulated that all names derived from landed properties were to be discarded. He was attached to his name : was Beaumarchais a landed property ? Beaumarchais wrote that his name was not a *nom de terre*, but a *nom de guerre*.

He had not become calmer. People grudged him a position in the political struggle. Back to the stage. The Revolution, too, needed diversion. He succeeded in having *Tarare* produced. As he was unable to establish himself as a " master of the masses," he became the *maître de plaisir* of the Revolution. After the celebration, which the Nation organised on the first anniversary of the storming of the Bastille, a pageant in honour of Voltaire was to be arranged by citizen Pierre Augustin Caron, this *ci-devant* Beaumarchais. The great man's earthly remains were to be buried in the Pantheon, and his collected works, in Beaumarchais' edition, were to be carried at the head of the procession. " I love the theatre

madly," he wrote—and his love became his business. The foremost theatre, the *Comédie française*, now had a rival, the *Théâtre du Marais*. Beaumarchais was financing this enterprise.

His money had been safely invested, and during this period of distress his wealth remained a power.

The Revolution had accepted the Constitution, but the King had not yet been dethroned. Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette, who hoped to avoid being forced to yield, decided to flee. When they reached Varennes they were made to return. They were no longer a King and a Queen. They were prisoners.

Beaumarchais was again at his desk during these exciting events. His fear of being forgotten prompted him to write another play: *The Guilty Mother*. *The Barber of Seville* and *The Marriage of Figaro* had made him internationally famous. He was convinced that a continuation of the ideas in these two plays, a revival of the characters in them, would bring him renewed success, renewed fame. The play was produced, but Beaumarchais' experience with the critics and the public resembled his first sentence in the La Blache lawsuit: "His audience did not like the author, and therefore the play did not appeal to them."

Beaumarchais realised that he had ceased to be appreciated as a dramatist, but he comforted himself with the thought that no dramatist was appreciated during this age. Only the stage-managers of the great street scenes, in which the people themselves played the leading rôles, and for which history wrote bloodthirsty dialogues, were popular.

The *émigrés*—how long ago it was that Beaumarchais had approached these men with a courtly bow—the King's brothers, the Comte d'Artois, his friend; and the Comte de Provence, his enemy, had persuaded the European Powers to intervene in France and to free the King. The declaration of war was expected daily, and the

legislative body, the National Assembly, lacked the most necessary equipment for an army.

At the end of his strenuous life, Beaumarchais would have enjoyed a short period of rest before his death. But according to "old tradition," new projects and demands were presented to him daily. While France was in utter confusion, speculators were occupied with the problems of "facilitating transportation on the isthmus of Suez," of planting rhubarb, of building a new bridge across the Seine. He was consulted about financial ventures, about organising State lotteries. This wealthy man, the most experienced of all speculators, was asked his expert opinion on the practical use of balloons, which had just been invented. He no longer received visitors; instead people had to write to him, because his hearing was very bad, and he flew into a rage when a caller smiled as a matter of course after some misunderstanding. He was afraid of being ridiculous.

He had gradually grown accustomed to revolutionary conditions. He was one of the thousands who asked himself how it was possible that his own life continued, when everything had changed, how he himself could be the same man, while everything round him had altered? His daughter Eugénie was grown up; many suitors asked for her hand in marriage. Beaumarchais was sentimental, and he could not bear the thought that in these troubled times she might marry a man who could be taken to the guillotine to-morrow because he belonged to the class which had ruled yesterday. He was equally uncertain of the future of those actually in power, for "no one could tell what the future might bring." He wanted to keep, his daughter at home. Beaumarchais did not permit her to marry even an adjutant of Lafayette, who had been a marquis and a prominent aristocrat, but who was now a leader of the people. Beaumarchais approved of only one of Eugénie's suitors, a Monsieur de Verginac, who was to become an Ambassador. For if Eugénie had married him she would have been safe at a foreign Court.

In March 1792—the war began two months later—a bookseller from Brussels called on Monsieur de Beaumarchais. Monsieur de la Haye had not come because Beaumarchais was Voltaire's publisher, but because he had once delivered arms and munitions to the United States of North America. De la Haye was interested in a huge business venture, which only Beaumarchais could carry through. There were sixty thousand rifles in Belgium. Beaumarchais would have an opportunity to prove to those who doubted his sincerity that he was more patriotic than the men who had loudly proclaimed their love for France during recent years.

History left Beaumarchais no peace. Was this his chance to become prominent, now that Mirabeau was dead? He grasped this opportunity. He negotiated with the Minister of War, offered seven hundred and fifty thousand *livres* in Geneva Annuity as security, received in return five hundred thousand *francs* in assignats as an advance payment, and promised to deliver the rifles.

War had been declared, but these arms had not arrived. Belgium refused to give them up. And while France shook with the cry of "The country is in danger," it was rumoured in Paris that the promised guns were in Beaumarchais' palace. People said that he would not relinquish them, because, as an aristocrat, he hoped to arm his own class, which was organising a counter-revolution, now that France was being attacked by foreign enemies. The Duc de Brunswick, in command of these foreign armies, threatened to destroy Paris if the Tuilleries, where the King was guarded by Swiss Guards, was stormed.

The watchword of this march upon Paris had been announced to the enemy's ranks. The city was terrified of the Allied Kings' forces which threatened the revolutionaries with a terrible revenge. Everyone was searching for arms. "In those ghastly August days a slogan was circulated in the Faubourg St. Antoine: How can we defend ourselves if we have nothing but pikes? Beaumarchais has sixty thousand rifles in his cellars."

In the night from August the eighth to the ninth thirty thousand men and women marched towards Beaumarchais' palace. He escaped through the garden. "If I had not got away, they would have torn me to pieces."

The next morning he returned to his palace after a restless night. He found that nothing had been stolen. The house had obviously been searched from attic to cellars, but as the mob had found nothing suspicious, they had not touched any of his possessions. Despite this fact Beaumarchais did not wish to remain in his house. He was afraid that a second raid might be more disastrous. He decided to spend the next night in the home of a friend. Here he slept peacefully, but he was suddenly awakened by a servant: "The mob is here, searching for you. They are about to break open the doors. Someone told them that you were staying here."

In his night-dress, Beaumarchais ran through the strange house. Despite his deafness, he could hear the banging on the door. A food cupboard was next to the kitchen. The front door was crashing. Beaumarchais opened the door of the cupboard, and pressing his face against the pane of glass in it, he saw the men carrying pikes, the agitated women, walking past him. This was the new age. As a child, pressing his face to the glass wall, he had seen the passers-by in the street, he had gazed at their splendid clothing; the gentlemen with their swords and their wigs, the ladies in gilded carriages, their cheeks carefully rouged, and he had wished that he, too, could be an aristocrat. He had cursed the class differences which separated him from these magnificent creatures. Now, as an old man, pressing his face against another glass surface, he saw the rulers of the new age: in rags, bloodthirsty, filled with hatred. Could he wish to be like them? His life was over. It did not matter whether they caught him, whether they hung him to a street standard, it did not matter what happened to him.

In August 1792 the list of prisoners in the Abbaye Prison resem-

bled a red book of the nobility. True, the names were not recorded in the proper sequence, rank was not observed, and a simple Chevalier followed a Duke and Peer of France. The ladies and gentlemen were crowded together in the prison. Their costumes and robes were still splendid, though the gold and silver braid was torn, their buttons of point lace were broken, and their laces were in tatters. Their bearing remained dignified, even when, cowering on the floor, they ate horrible food from dented bowls with their fingers. They sat or stood in groups, and conversed as though they were in a *salon* and not in a prison. Again and again names, simple surnames without the titles that had preceded them, were shouted into the vaulted prison. The ladies and gentlemen arose when they were called, bowed to their relatives and acquaintances and left. They knew that they would be taken to the guillotine within an hour, but they walked with dignified and measured steps.

Beaumarchais was lonely in this illustrious company to which he had tried to be admitted throughout his life. In the face of death the marquises and the countesses, the baronesses and dukes wanted privacy; they did not want a social climber to disturb the poise with which they were awaiting the end. If one of them, a man or a woman, showed any fear of death, an outsider was not to witness this weakness. They had lived badly; they wanted to die well. They pretended not to understand the name of this man whom they knew by sight; they acted as though this author of *The Marriage of Figaro*, this favourite among ladies, this adviser to ministers, was a stranger to them. His hand behind his ear, he moved from group to group trying to take part in the conversation. He could not hear. He only realised that he was being rebuffed. Suddenly stubborn, he thought that this was best. He tried to find a familiar face among these people; tried to recognise a countess or a marquis under a dishevelled wig, a tangled mass of hair. Some of these aristocrats, who had formerly ignored this *parvenu*, now acknow-

ledged his presence when they recognised him. He decided to avoid them, to look down at the floor, and not to put his hand behind his ear, though he could not hear what was said.

He closed his eyes and waited. He did not hear his name being called; they had to come over and shake him. Was death near? He had enjoyed living with the aristocracy. Was he to die with them as well? An urge to live took possession of him when he rose and walked firmly to the door; the ladies and gentlemen whom he left behind envied him his courage, almost regretting that they had rebuffed him during his hours of tribulation.

The cart was not awaiting this man of the people. Beaumarchais was not taken to the guillotine. Those in power had remembered that he had fought against the shameful injustice of Maupeou's Parliament, that the author of *The Marriage of Figaro* was a forerunner of the Revolution. The devastating reign of terror had not yet begun; it was the period of devastating fear, and this man's head, one of the first to rebel against the accident of birth, was not destined for the guillotine.

During the first six days of September no less than fourteen hundred prisoners were executed. The system governing these executions is clearly reflected in the declaration of a judge who replied when he was told to judge according to the law: "It is not my business to take orders. Legal action can be taken after these damned scoundrels are a head shorter."

No lawsuits: When Beaumarchais was released from prison he longed, even during these terrible days, to take legal action against the omnipotent revolutionary tribunal, this assembly of terrorists, which was ruling under the name of the *Committee of Public Safety*. As his life had been saved, his energies had revived. His fortune was at stake. He had received only five hundred thousand *francs* for his Geneva Annuity, which was worth seven hundred and fifty thousand *livres*. He could not convince his fellow-citizens that sixty thousand rifles had actually been at his disposal, that with the

Government's help he could have delivered them. He must finish this transaction which he had begun. If he continued to be outlawed, if he had to creep from one hiding-place to another, France would remain unarmed.

Beaumarchais returned to his palace when he left prison, though his liberators had advised him to hide in a peasant's house near the city until these mass executions were over.

Alarm-bells pealed over Paris. The environments of the city, all of Paris, was to know that the people were sitting in judgment, that every time the bells pealed the guillotine had dropped, and that the *ancien régime* and all the men and women who belonged to it were being destroyed. Beaumarchais was aware that his intelligent face, which had broadened somewhat during his years of good living, and which expressed as much irony as petulant pity for himself, was well known in Paris. He knew that the whole city believed that he was keeping back arms which the nation needed for her defence. If any one of the men carrying a pike recognised him and called out his name, this would mean death. Apart from the commissioners, wearing tricolour scarves, roaming bands of men who followed their own initiative were acting as judges. The night was cool. Beaumarchais, this spoiled Parisian, had always driven and not walked since he became successful, since he entered the great world, for his enemies were not to think that he could not afford a carriage. That evening he trudged towards the city. He did not hear the pealing of the bells. The humming in his ears, for he was almost entirely deaf, was monotonous. The noises of the night did not frighten him. Nevertheless, he began to run. He gasped. He broke out in perspiration. He was short of breath. He was conscious that he was in the gravest danger. Every bush he brushed against as he crossed the fields startled him. Suddenly, however, he walked more firmly; he felt as though the last great change had occurred within him. He visualised the scene which his father had described to him in his youth: he saw Daniel Caron, the

watchmaker, running through the night to the “Church in the desert.” He no longer felt as though he were walking towards Paris to rescue his fortune, to vindicate his honour before the nation, to win a position in the new order, so that he would again be busy and occupied with business as he had been in the *ancien régime*. He walked forward as though he carried within himself the law of eternal justice, as though he were suffering for a just faith, which, actually, he had replaced throughout his life by his faith in himself. It seemed to him that, once before, he had thus walked through this district in the night, frightened of watchful eyes and possible assaults, and in the unshakable faith, in the firm belief that this dangerous march was made sacred by his intention.

CHAPTER II

IN the battle of Valmy the revolutionary army defeated the United armies of the helpful kings. The author of *Clavigo*, of whom Beaumarchais had said that he showed more brainlessness than talent, was present at this battle. His weighty words indicated the importance of the day "on which a new epoch of world history began." Twenty years after the author of the *Mémoires* saw the performance of *Clavigo*, Herr von Goethe's written and spoken words were seriously considered far beyond the borders of the German Province where he lived. Beaumarchais, on the other hand, was forgotten. He was in exile in a small town in Northern Germany, living in a miserable room. He was shaken by fear that his beloved daughter Eugénie, his wife, and his sister Julie, who had been arrested, would die on the guillotine for his sake while he himself had escaped. He had lost the desire and the energy to seek forgetfulness at his desk. He took up his pen only to write woe-begone letters, to send calls for help into the world, cries of despair and requests for money.

Beaumarchais had undertaken an adventurous journey round the frontiers of France on behalf of the *Committee of Public Safety*. He was trying to get the sixty thousand rifles for the French Army. While he was away, *in absentia*, his name had been included in the list of exiles. Undoubtedly he escaped death by not returning to France. He lost everything, however, but "his miserable breath," which he cursed. Poverty damned him to live in solitude: he had to leave Hamburg, where at least he enjoyed intellectual conversations with Talleyrand, the intellectual. Now he was living, utterly deserted, in a small town near Lübeck. Entirely dependent upon himself, and frightened for his family, he could hardly think. But when he considered the events of his life in their logical sequence, he was conscious that he was the first man who had fought against the

“accident of birth,” and that without his foresight, which amounted to genius, France would never have taken part in the United States’ war of liberation. Perhaps, if he had not existed, Louis XVI might still be living comfortably in Versailles. Perhaps, had he, Beaumarchais, not intervened, Marie Antoinette would still be unhappily searching diversions in the Trianon. The King and the Queen of France had died on the guillotine. The people, whom Beaumarchais had inspired, were in power. “They owe it to me,” he thought again and again, “to me. My struggle for my own small career, which I achieved after I failed to make a really great success, developed into a mass struggle, which I did not desire.”

He realised that destiny, with some secret intention, had driven him upon a road which he would have avoided, if he had known the end towards which it was leading. When he wrote his *Mémoires*, he had been forced to defend himself, an instinct of self-preservation had prompted him to attack his enemies. When he had implored the King to help in the liberation of America, he had hoped to obtain an office for himself, to make money. Though his help to the people had been involuntarily given, they owed him a great deal. “Me, me,” he wrote. He had to make his breakfast last for the day in order not to starve. He was cold in this desolate district, in his unheated room. Yet the United States of America owed him millions; the *Committee of Public Safety* of the new French Republic owed him almost a million. “Give Belizar an obolus,” he begged. “Don’t let me starve.” His letters were in his best style; he hoped that they would have the desired effect. No answers reached him. He received only anxious messages from Paris. Yes, his wife and daughter had been released from prison. But Theresa had been forced publicly to renounce him, and Eugénie wrote that she did not want to marry the man he had chosen for her. Was his wife’s renunciation a formal act, performed to save his property, or had she, too, altered in this age when everything was taking on new values? Eugénie had ceased to obey him; her respectful letter

showed her determination to do as she wished. If only he could return to Paris. He had been upbraided because every action of his life had been prompted by egotism, because what he had done for France had been prompted by selfish motives. He wanted to prove to these accusers that, at the end of his life, when he was living in poverty, he had been wrongly accused, that he was thinking only of the nation. He wrote *Mémoires*, carefully planned advice to the *Committee of Public Safety*.

The old gentleman, who described himself as grey and fat, when he answered the questions on his passport, walked about the town gesticulating. The inhabitants called him the "poor Frenchman." He did not know their language; besides, he was too deaf to have heard them in any case. But if he had known how they felt he would have been quite desperate, for he could never bear pity.

When he saw that his pleading letters were to remain unanswered, he prepared to fight for the last time. The Government of the United States, to whom he had generously granted a respite, would not even send him a small sum in advance, a sum for which he implored them. The French Government, the new Republic, was not willing to thank him for his good advice. His brain had remained inventive enough to discover a way out. The reign of terror was over in Paris. Not until then did Reason, which had been deified but not respected, come into her own. The authorities realised that it was absurd to exile a man who had been active in foreign countries on behalf of the new liberty. Beaumarchais' name was struck from the list.

Beaumarchais was so happy when he had returned to the valuable desk in his palace that he granted every wish expressed to him. Eugénie had not married Monsieur de Verginac; she had fallen in love with Monsieur de la Rue, Lafayette's young adjutant: She must marry him as soon as possible. If there was happiness in life,

one should not hesitate, not lose an hour. Beaumarchais, too, married again: he remarried Theresa, as their marriage had been dissolved. The world seemed changed, and it was not easy for him to adjust himself. Business conditions, too, had altered. Permanent measurements for goods no longer existed. Prices had begun to soar madly, money had lost its value. The great merchant, accustomed to dealing in sums of six figures and to consider them as wealth, was made uncomfortable by the huge amounts he spent in paper assignats. Business had become difficult. He had lost his old connections, and with his hand at his ear, though he could not hear in any case, it was almost impossible to make new business friends.

Beaumarchais had to fight for his sequestered property. Despite the opposition he met he had not ceased to hope for a career. When a new minister was appointed to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Beaumarchais was delighted to learn that this "Bourgeois-Minister" was his old friend Talleyrand. The former bishop, the former aristocrat, had intrigued his way into this high office of State. Had he applied the old methods? Beaumarchais felt rather than knew that the old values were beginning to return. People continued to talk about Freedom, Equality, and Fraternity; they addressed each other as "citizen," but the "de" before a name was no longer a disgrace, nor did it jeopardise a man's career if he had belonged to the *ancien régime*. It was necessary only to disavow this fact in words; apart from this concession a former aristocrat could live as though the Bastille had never been stormed, as though Paris had grown and one had never left Versailles. People were as well dressed as ever. But where were the poets who were to glorify the years of Revolution which had passed? The population felt an aversion towards these years. The fact that privileges were abolished was welcomed, but the bloody struggle for this equality had shocked the sensibilities of those who had survived it. The population wanted to forget this conflict, and when deaf old

Monsieur de Beaumarchais came to the *Comédie française* to suggest the revival of his plays, he was welcomed. Naturally, why should *The Marriage of Figaro*, *The Barber of Seville*, *The Guilty Mother*, or *Tarare* not be given? After all, Beaumarchais was the only surviving author of the great age—before the great age.

The old man was happy when he stood before the curtain, though he could not hear the audience applaud or call him by name. His friend Gudin was beside him. He had not changed, but it was not easy for Beaumarchais to understand him. He could not hear what his friend was saying, but this familiar face made him happy, and he knew by Gudin's nod that he approved of what he had said.

Talleyrand, the “Bourgeois-Minister,” received Monsieur de Beaumarchais graciously. He did not walk over to this former fellow-sufferer in exile, whom he had known in Hamburg, because he had a club-foot. But Talleyrand shook hands warmly with Beaumarchais, and he might have granted his wish if he had not felt uncomfortable when his guest could not hear his clever remarks. A man could not go to America as an Ambassador who was not only capable, as a diplomat, of pretending to be deaf, but who really was deaf. This arch-intriguer and this arch-speculator might have co-operated splendidly; as an Ambassador to the United States Beaumarchais might have put through his claims. As it was, the sum owed him was paid to his heirs thirty-six years after his death. And Talleyrand considered his deafness an unsurmountable difficulty, and refused his request.

Beaumarchais had not given up all hope. A young general had conquered new territory for France in an Italian campaign, he had won many battles, and he returned to Paris in triumph. He was acclaimed as the new hero of the nation. General Desaix, whom Beaumarchais had met through General Dumas, was one of his officers. The great novelist's father was a brother-in-law of de la Rue, Beaumarchais' son-in-law. General Dumas had been glad to

tell his comrade Desaix that the famous author wished to meet the young and victorious general.

In March 1798 Beaumarchais received a letter. "Citizen," Bonaparte wrote with Napoleonic brevity, "I thank you, and I shall be glad of an opportunity to meet the author of *The Guilty Mother*." Beaumarchais read between the lines: General Bonaparte had addressed him as the author of *The Guilty Mother*? The General thus conceded to him only a passing prominence. He acknowledged him only as the author of this last, and, as he knew, least good of his plays. He ignored the fact that Beaumarchais' struggle against the "accident of birth" had paved the way for his, Bonaparte's, career. Was it true that General Bonaparte had publicly expressed his disapproval of a private individual who lived in so magnificent a palace? Had he not impressed this general? Beaumarchais tried to win him through Josephine. The short, thin Corsican was glad whenever his wife was able to obtain some money, but he was displeased when she tried to force people on him whom he disliked. Beaumarchais knew that his great days were over. He was aware that the "government of women" which had furthered his career was almost at an end. The age of great men had begun.

EPILOGUE

ON the evening of the seventeenth of May, 1799, Beaumarchais went to bed earlier than usual. He had been cheerful when he said good night to his family. The next morning he was found dead in his bed. He had not complained about being in pain, he had not mentioned that he felt particularly weak or tired. The end had come quickly and unexpectedly. His expression was peaceful. Even in the face of death Beaumarchais maintained his pose of joyous calm. His friends and relatives did not know how he had died—but did they understand how he had lived?

About fifty years after Beaumarchais' death his literary legacy was discovered. It consisted of huge bundles of letters and documents, very neatly kept. The old man, who had become completely deaf, had assiduously and secretly collected every scrap of paper which reminded him of his active life. He wanted to talk to the past, as he could no longer hear the present.

Not until these documents were found was it possible for posterity clearly to see this face which had assumed so many masks. Nevertheless, Saint-Beuve wrote: *Chez Beaumarchais il y aura toujours un cabinet secret, où le public n'entrera pas.* New handwritten documents about and by Beaumarchais were frequently found in the archives of large cities all over the world—in London, Paris, Vienna, Madrid, and in the American museums and libraries. The present biographer has used these documents and the vast literature about Beaumarchais for this book, in so far as these documents seemed necessary in his account of Beaumarchais, the man, and of his period. To facilitate understanding, the quotations from Beaumarchais and from his contemporaries have been written in modern language, but only the style of these quotations has been altered. The passages in quota-

tion marks have been taken from the works of Beaumarchais or his contemporaries.

The number of books, pamphlets, and documents, which were read in order to follow the many deviations of this versatile life, is too great to be included in full in this biography.

P. F.

VIENNA, *November 1934.*

INDEX

A

Academy of Sciences (England), 38
 Adelaide, Princess, 19-20, 58, 60-1,
 63-4, 73-4, 77, 91, 122-3, 163
 Aiguillon, Duc de, 145
 d'Alembert, —, 27, 51, 94
 America, North, 38, 43, 77, 209-24,
 233-9, 243-4, 246-8, 254, 259, 263,
 303-4
Ami des Hommes, 261, 283
 d'Arbonnes, —, 83
 d'Argenson, Marquis, 43, 48, 78
 d'Arnot, Baculard, 155, 157
 d'Arpajon, Abbé, 48
 d'Artois, Comte, 268-9, 278-9, 294
 d'Avelon, —, 255
 d'Ayen, Duc, 14, 121

B

Barber of Seville, 137-8, 139, 156, 175,
 182, 200, 202, 212, 230-2, 240-1,
 249, 261, 279, 294, 306
 Barbier, 16
 Baskerville (the type-caster), 258
 Beaumarchais, Geneviève de, 127-8,
 133, 135-6
 Beaumarchais, Origin of name, 49
 Belleflore, Count de, 121
 Bergasse, —, 280-1
 Bernis, Cardinal de, 26
 Binet, M. de, 108
 Blache, Comte de la, 134-6, 148-53,
 155, 175, 225, 248, 294
 Boufflers, Madame de, 11
 Bourbon, House of, 70, 175, 181, 191
 Brennelerie, Gudin de la, 137-8, 141-2,
 144, 150, 161, 241, 256, 257, 306
 Breteuil, Baron de, 270

Breton, Pauline de, 88-90, 95, 107,
 112, 116-8, 124, 209
 Brienne, de, 282
 Broglie, Comte de, 201
 Brunswick, Duke of, 296

C

Café de la Régence, 51
 Calonne, 256, 281-3
 Calvinism, vii
 Caron, André-Charles, vii, 3-5, 10, 17,
 18, 49-50, 57, 59, 79-80, 82, 87,
 90-1, 95, 106, 109, 134, 175, 226,
 245-6
 Caron, Daniel, vii-viii, 300
 Caron, Jeanne, 89
 Caron, Julie, 87, 89, 110, 116, 175,
 273, 302
 Caron, Lisette, 92, 101-6
 Caron, Marie Fortain, vii-viii
 Caron, Miron, 162
 Casanova, 204
 Catherine II of Russia, 145, 257, 267
 Catholic faith, vii, 3
 Chamfort, —, 138-9, 229, 260-2, 270,
 283
 Chamissard Revolt, ix
Characters and Authors, 261
 Charles I of England, 146, 215
 Charles III of Spain, 105-7, 108-9,
 110-1
 Charles X of France, 113
 Châteauroux, Duchesse de, 16
 Chaulnes, Duc de, 139-40, 141-4, 148,
 151
 Chénau, 275-6
 Choiseul, Duc de, 77, 92, 94, 104, 108,
 109, 145, 147, 163, 201, 215
 Clairon, Mademoiselle, 119, 144

Clairval, —, 138-9
Clavigo (Goethe), 302
 Clavigo y Fajardo, Don José, 92, 96-9,
 101-6, 160, 177, 193-4
 Collé, 126, 242
 Colonne, Abbé de, 275
 Comédie française, 230, 232, 240-1,
 242-3, 268-9, 294, 306
 Comédiens Italiens, 138-9
 Compagnie des Eaux, 282-3
 Condorcet, 258
 Conti, Prince de, 20, 89, 123-4, 136,
 161-2, 166, 174, 176-7, 198
Contrat Social, 85, 237
 Corneille, 55
 Crébillons, 55
 Croix, Marquise de la, 107-9, 111-2
 Crosne, de, 284-5

D

Dairolles, 150-1, 155-7
 Deane, Silas, 219-20, 222-3, 233, 236,
 238, 247-8
 Demezieu, Paris, 134
 Desaix, Gen., 306
Diable Boiteux, 121
 Diderot, 27, 51, 114, 119-20, 229, 242
 Dubarry, Comte Jean, 57-8, 121-2, 164
 Dubarry, Comtesse, 122-3, 145-6, 159,
 163-5, 168, 170, 172-4
 Dubourg, Dr., 226
 Dumas, Gen., 306
 Dumesnil, Madame, 138-9
 Durant, M., 106
 Duras, Duc de, 231-2, 241-2, 243
 Duverney, Paris, 67-77, 79, 81-2, 86,
 88, 89, 92-3, 101, 105, 110, 120,
 121-2, 127, 134-5, 148, 166, 218, 223
 Duverney, Paris-Montmartel, 69

E

East India Company, French, 68, 110
 Elizabeth, Empress of Russia, 63, 199

d'Eon, Chevalier, 199-204
Esprit des Lois, 85
 Etioles, 54-5
 Eugénie (daughter of Beaumarchais by
 Thérèse), 245, 259, 273, 284, 295,
 302-4
Eugénie, 119, 123-7, 169, 171, 265, 267

F

Flamande (ship), 234
 Fleury, Cardinal, 59
 Fortain, Marie, *see* Caron, Marie
 Fortain
 Fouché, 163
 Francys, de, 223, 234, 246, 254
 Franklin, Benjamin, 226, 236-8, 247,
 256
 Franquet, Madame, 39-40, 44-9, 52,
 135-6, 280
 Franquet, Pierre Augustin, 40-1, 44-7,
 52, 136
 Frederick the Great, 26, 43, 70, 145,
 186, 234, 254, 257, 258
 Freemasonry, 256, 266
 Fronde, 147
 Fronsac, Duc de, 266, 268

G

Gazette de France, 155
 George III of England, 202-3, 237
 Gerard, 219, 247-8
 Gerbier, 155
 Gleichen, Baron von, 107
 Goethe, 99, 160, 193-4, 302
 Goetzmann, Madame, 150-60, 162
 Goetzmann, M., 148-60, 197, 212, 226,
 241, 243
 Graham, Mr., 29
 Grimaldi, 100-2, 104
 Grimm, Baron de, 126, 267
 Gudin, *see* Brennelerie, Gudin de la
 Guilbert, 12-13, 100
Guilty Mother, 294, 306-7
 Guimard, Mademoiselle, 119

H

Habsburg, House of, 70, 181
 Haye, de la, 296
 Helvetius, 85
 Hesse-Cassel, Margrave of, 215, 235
Homme, 85
 Huguenots, vii, ix, 3, 19

I

Irene, 257

J

Jansenites, ix
 Jay, John, 247
 Jay, Le, 150-1, 153-5
 Jefferson, Thomas, 217
 Jesuits, ix, 94
 Joly, M., 48
 Josephine (Napoleon's), 307
Journal de Paris, 274
 Jussapow, Prince, 267-8

K

Kannitz, Prince, 186-90, 191-2
 Kornmann, 280-1

L

Laborde, de, 162, 165
 Lafayette, Marquis de, 238, 292, 304
 Lamballe, Princess, 262
 Lamotte, Comtesse, 279
 Lavallière, Duc de, 60, 83, 90, 95
 Law, John, 67-8, 111, 147
 Lebrun, Vigée, 17
 Lee, Arthur, 209-10, 214, 222-4, 235,
 247-8
 Lenoir, de, 196, 266, 268
 Lenormant, M., 15, 17, 54-5, 196
 Lépine, 49
 Leveque, Geneviève, *see* Beaumarchais,
 Geneviève de
 Lizy sur Oureq, vii
 Loménie, Louis de, 289

London, 28-9, 38, 163, 168-9, 172,
 175-7, 199-201, 203, 212, 238, 269
 Louis, Dauphin (father of Louis XVI),
 71, 73, 81, 113
 Louis XIV, vii-ix, 4, 9, 71, 93, 105-6,
 115, 147, 175
 Louis XV, viii, 14-20, 26, 30, 31-7,
 41-4, 46, 53-4, 58-60, 63-4, 67,
 69-74, 77, 80-2, 90-1, 94, 105, 108,
 113-4, 119, 121-2, 142, 145-7, 156,
 158-60, 163-4, 167-8, 170-5, 196,
 198-201, 229, 232
 Louis XVI, 145, 160, 163, 173-80, 183,
 185-7, 191-6, 199-200, 202-4, 207-8,
 212-5, 224, 236, 238-9, 243, 247, 255,
 262-72, 274-5, 276-9, 284-5, 290-2,
 294, 296, 303
 Louis XVIII, 113, 274-6, 278, 294
 Louise, Princess, 61, 77
 Louisiana, 93, 101, 110-1

M

Maine, Duc de, viii
 Maintenon, Marquise de, 70-1, 164
 Mallorca, 110
 Maria Theresa, 15, 20, 35, 43, 70, 145,
 174, 181-2, 184-6, 188-9, 191-3,
 195, 224
 Maricy, M. de, 83
 Marie Antoinette, 145, 160, 163, 174,
 176-7, 179, 181-2, 185-8, 207-8, 215,
 227-8, 256, 260, 262-4, 278-9,
 281-2, 285, 290, 292, 294, 303
 Marin, M., 155, 157
 Marmontel, 138-9, 229
Marriage of Figaro, The, 167, 182, 212,
 217, 248, 256, 259, 261-72, 274, 276,
 285, 294, 298-9, 306
 Marsollier, 177, 194
 Matignon, Madame de, 11
 Maupeou, Chancellor, 145, 147, 155,
 225, 299
 Maurepas, Comte de, 197-8, 200, 208,
 219, 221, 224, 239, 256, 264, 269

Mercure de France, 30, 37
 Mercy, Comte, 181, 285
 Mesnard, Madame, 139-41, 149, 161
 Mirabeau, Marquis de, 261, 283, 292,
 296
 Miron, 89
 Molière, 26, 159, 250
 Montesquieu, Baron de, 85, 169
 Morande, Théveneau de, 163-6, 168,
 169-72, 175, 179, 189, 200-1, 203,
 223, 234, 246
 Moritz of Saxony, 20

N

Nantes, Edict of, vii
 Napoleon I, 271, 306-7
 Narcurelle, Comte, 142
 Nassau-Siegen, Prince of, 253, 275
Natural Son, 119
 Necker, 238, 255-6, 282
 Nivernais, Duc de, 125
 Noailles, Cardinal of, 3
 Noailles, Duc de, 125
 Noailles, Marshal de, 48

O

Oberkirch, Baroness, 267
 d'Orléans, Duc, 125

P

Paesillo, 278
 Pankoucke, 257
 Paul, Grand Duke of Russia, 267
 Paute, M. le, 28-9, 30-2
Pensador, 96
 Perrier brothers, 282
 Piny, M., 108
 Pitt, William (the elder), 70, 210
 Pluto, 236
 Poisson, Madame, 16-7
 Poisson, Monsieur, 69
 Polignac, Princess, 262, 268

Pompadour, Marquise de, 15-18, 26,
 36-8, 42-4, 54, 57, 59, 69-71, 74,
 90, 93-4, 108-9, III, 122-3, 164,
 187, 196-7

Portier des Chartreux, 19

Provence, Comte de, *see* Louis XVIII

Q

Querchy, Marquis de, 199-200

R

Racine, 55
 Revolution, French, 15, 35, 54, 82-3,
 85, 94, 113, 120, 125, 140, 147-8,
 153, 167, 198, 204, 212, 237, 270-1,
 285, 290 *et seq.*
 Richelieu, Duc de, 16, 231-2, 243, 266
 Richelieu, Duchesse de, 268
 Rochambeau, Comte de, 254
 Rochford, Lord, 106, 110, 169-72,
 177-8, 211, 214
 Rohan, Cardinal de, 279
 Rothschilds, the, 68
 Rousseau, J. J., 85, 114, 128, 229, 237,
 273
 Rue, de la, 306

S

Saint-Beuve, 308
 St. Cyr, 70
 St. Florentin, Comte de, 28-9, 80-2, 90,
 264
 Saint-Palayes, 260
 Salieri, 281
 San Domingo, 88-9, 116
Sans-culottes, 237
 Sartines, de, 149, 153, 162-6, 175-80,
 191, 194-8
 Sauvigny, Béthier de, 154
Secret Memoirs of a Prostitute, 163
 Sedaine, 138-9, 229
 Ségur, Comte de, 237
 Seilern, Count, 182-4, 188-9

Seven Years' War, 69–70, 77, 198–9, 234
 Sierra Morena, 101, 109
 Steyès, 284
 Sonnenfels, von, 190–1
 Sophie, Princess, 61, 77
 Spanish Succession, Wars of, 175
Spectator, 96
 Steuben, Baron von, 234, 254
 Stormont, Lord, 218, 233, 239
 Stuart, Charles Edward, 38
 Swieten, van, 181

T

Talleyrand, 302, 305–6
Tarare, 273, 281, 293, 306
 Target, 224–5
 Terray, 145
 Théâtre du Marais, 294
 Théâtre français, 139, 156, 257
 Turgot, 195–7, 207, 215, 238
Two Friends, 126, 128, 284

V

Vaubernier, Jean, *see* Dubarry,
 Comtesse
 Vaucel, de, 83

Vaudreuil, Comte de, 260–1, 262–3,
 266, 268–9, 278
 Vergennes, Comte de, 200, 208, 214–5,
 217–21, 226–7, 233, 239, 247–8, 258,
 264

Verginac, de, 295, 304

Verlegrand, 46–8

Vhal, Gen., 105

Victoire, Princess, 61, 64, 77

Villers, Thérèse Willermawla de, 195,
 216, 227, 245–6, 273, 281, 302–3,
 305

Villons, 25

Vintres, Comte de, 142

Voltaire, 4, 26, 55, 67, 83, 85, 94, 114,
 136, 160, 187, 229–30, 240, 256–8,
 267, 273, 293

Vrillière, Duc de la, 122–3, 143–4,
 148–9, 151, 153

W

Washington, George, 234–5, 254
 Wilkes, John, 169–70, 200, 208–9,
 211–2
 Willermawla, Thérèse, *see* Villers,
 Thérèse Willermawla de